TODAY'S SCIENCE FICTION—TOMORROW'S FACT • MARCH 25c

STARTLING stories

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

featuring **CENTAURUS** *a novel by Sam Merwin Jr.*

and **THE SHORE OF TOMORROW** *by Chad Oliver*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'LL MAIL YOU $1,000.00 IN STRICT CONFIDENCE

Yes, if you are steadily employed and of good character I will be glad to loan you $50, $100, $200, $300, $500 or up to $1,000.00 ON YOUR SIGNATURE! I'll send you the amount you need QUICKLY . . . and your friends, neighbors, family, even your employer will not be contacted. No wonder so many thousands of smart men and women like yourself have used Postal Finance's borrow-by-mail service for years — it's the best way to get money when you need it in complete privacy. There is NO time off from work . . . NO witnesses or co-signers . . . NO insurance required . . . NO embarrassing investigations. Just send in the coupon below TODAY. We will rush you a FREE Loan Application so you can get the money you need RIGHT AWAY!

YOU PAY ME BACK AT YOUR CONVENIENCE

Postal's *low lawful* rates mean LOW COST loans for you, supervised by the Banking Department of the state. That is one of the important reasons why men and women from all over the country rely on Postal Finance when they need money quickly. Our terms are so liberal that you can pay back your loan in small monthly payments out of your future earnings. Take as long as 20 months to repay . . . or pay it back within a matter of weeks . . . whichever fits your budget. If your loan is repaid ahead of time, you pay ONLY for the time you use the money . . . not a day longer!

You can borrow from the old, established Postal Finance Company with complete confidence. It is licensed by and bonded to the state, to do business under the Small Loan Law . . . your assurance of reasonable, low lawful rates and Supervised Reliability in your dealings with Postal. You will be happy to know that the average monthly interest on a $100 loan is only $1.73, on our 20-month repayment plan . . . $3.35 for $200 . . . $4.60 for a $300 loan. Even a person with small means can afford Postal's special service!

GET IT QUICK . . .

Our service is as fast as the United States mails . . . we are as near to you as your mail box. For really quick service rush us the coupon below, right NOW. As soon as we receive it we will RUSH by Airmail everything you need to get the money you want right away . . . FREE Loan Application and full particulars in a plain envelope. You'll be amazed by the speed with which we take care of your money needs!

Satisfaction Guaranteed

"If for any reason you are not completely satisfied with EVERY phase of our dealings with you, you may return the money within 15 days, and IT COSTS YOU NOTHING."

PAY ALL YOUR BILLS AT ONCE

There are many reasons why you want money RIGHT NOW. You may want to pay up all your bills . . . take care of personal or business emergencies . . . taxes . . . doctor, dental or hospital expenses . . . insurance premiums . . . educational expenses . . . seasonal purchases . . . or tide yourself or your family over some period of heavy expense. Does your home need repairs? Why wait until damage gets worse? Fix up your home NOW . . . take months to repay!

Whether you need money to repair your car, to buy furniture, or pay up debts and bills . . . you will find that the Postal way is the intelligent way to solve your money problems. Just think, instead of having to worry about so MANY bills — you can pay EVERYBODY AT ONCE. Use this reliable way to keep your credit standing good in your town. Take advantage of this quick service. The money you need is here waiting for you. Get your FREE Loan Application immediately by rushing the coupon TODAY!

MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY!

Mr. D. J. Levitt, President
Postal Finance Co., Dept. C-3
15th & Harney; Omaha, Nebraska

Please rush to me in a plain envelope my FREE Loan Application and Full Particulars without obligation — so if I decide to borrow I can get the money I need RIGHT AWAY.

Name .....

Address .....

Town ..... State .....

Occupation ..... Age .....

Amount you want to borrow $.....

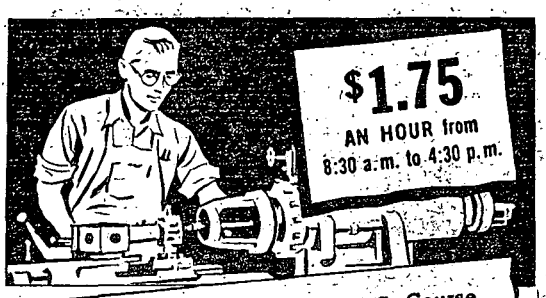
POSTAL FINANCE COMPANY

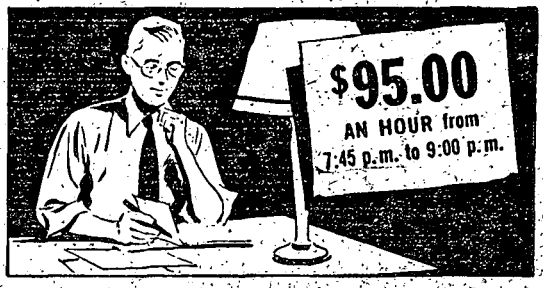
Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

Dept. C-3, 15th and HARNEY, OMAHA, NEBRASKA

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOST YOUR **EARNING** POWER DURING THE **HOURS** THAT **COUNT**





"Every hour I spent on my I. C. S. Course has been worth $95.00 to me! My position, my $7,000 a year income, my home, my family's happiness—I owe it to spare-time training with I. C. S."

EVERY MAIL brings letters like this from men and women who studied I. C. S. courses in their spare time.

What are *you* doing with the hours after supper? Can you afford to let them slip by unimproved when you can easily make them mean so much?

No matter where you live, I. C. S. will come to you. No matter what your handicaps or achievements, whether you make $2,000 or $20,000 a year, I. C. S. has a plan to fit your needs exactly. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply written, fully illustrated I. C. S. textbooks make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 391 I. C. S. courses can be your springboard to success.

° ° ° °

An hour or two a day spent with I. C. S. will prepare you for the position you want in the work you like best. Doubt it? Then put it up to *us* to prove it! Mark and mail this coupon *—now!* We'll send you full information plus *free* book, "How to Succeed."

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

ICS

BOX 3968-Z, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, send me "HOW to SUCCEED" and the booklet about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

ART
- ☐ Commercial Art
- ☐ Magazine and Book Illustrating
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering
- ☐ Fashion Illustrating

AUTOMOTIVE
- ☐ Automobile, Mechanic
- ☐ Auto-Elec. Technician
- ☐ Auto Body Rebuilding and Refinishing
- ☐ Diesel—Gas Engines

AVIATION
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineering Jr.
- ☐ Aircraft Engine Mechanic
- ☐ Airplane Drafting

BUILDING
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Arch. Drafting
- ☐ Building Contractor
- ☐ Estimating
- ☐ Carpenter and Mill Work
- ☐ Carpenter Foreman
- ☐ Reading Blueprints
- ☐ House Planning
- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Heating
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Electrician

BUSINESS
- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Certified Public Accountant
- ☐ Accounting
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Personnel and Labor Relations
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Retail Business Management
- ☐ Managing Small Business
- ☐ Sales Management
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Traffic Management

CHEMISTRY
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry
- ☐ Analytical Chemistry
- ☐ Petroleum—Nat'l Gas
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making
- ☐ Plastics

CIVIL, STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Reading Blueprints
- ☐ Concrete Construction
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering

DRAFTING
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Sheet Metal Drafting
- ☐ Mine Surveying and Drafting

ELECTRICAL
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electrician
- ☐ Electrical Maintenance
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electric Power and Light
- ☐ Lineman

HIGH SCHOOL
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Good English

MECHANICAL AND SHOP
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Supervision
- ☐ Foremanship
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Machine Design-Drafting
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Tool Design
- ☐ Industrial Instrumentation
- ☐ Machine Shop Inspection
- ☐ Reading Blueprints
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Gas—Electric Welding
- ☐ Heat Treatment—Metallurgy
- ☐ Sheet Metal Work
- ☐ Sheet Metal Pattern Drafting
- ☐ Refrigeration

POWER
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Diesel—Electric
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Stationary Steam Engineering
- ☐ Stationary Fireman

RADIO, TELEVISION, COMMUNICATIONS
- ☐ General Radio
- ☐ Radio Operation
- ☐ Radio Servicing—FM
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Telephone Work

RAILROAD
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Air Brakes ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Railroad Administration

TEXTILE
- ☐ Textile Engineering
- ☐ Cotton Manufacture
- ☐ Rayon Manufacture
- ☐ Woolen Manufacture
- ☐ Loom Fixing
- ☐ Finishing and Dyeing
- ☐ Textile Designing

HOME ARTS
- ☐ Dressmaking and Designing
- ☐ Cookery
- ☐ Tea Room Management

Name_____ Age_____ Home Address_____

City_____ State_____ Working Hours_____ A.M. to_____ P.M.

Occupation_____

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOW PUBLISHED EVERY MONTH

STARTLING stories

Vol. 29, No. 2 A THRILLING PUBLICATION March, 1953

Featured Novel

CENTAURUS ..... **Sam Merwin, Jr.** 10

Through space and time came the Flying Saucers in the most exciting manhunt ever known . . . with prizes for everybody

A Full-Length Novelet

THE SHORE OF TOMORROW ..... **Chad Oliver** 90

His was a lonely vigil . . . a strange and perilous mission that served to set him apart from man and alien alike . . .

Short Stories

THE GINGERBREAD HOUSE ..... **Joseph Slotkin** 70

They were part of a lovely legend, almost too good to last

THE SOUL OF THE OISUTA ..... **R. Bretnor** 78

It was D for diamonds—and D-Day was approaching rapidly!

OUTSIGHT ..... **Colin G. Jameson Sr. and Jr.** 83

It is a wise child that knows its father and believes in him

STEPPING STONE ..... **Charles F. Ksanda** 113

Other voices, other planets—these things would haunt him!

THE AMBASSADOR FROM THE 21st CENTURY ..... **Harry J. Shay** 122

He stepped out of tomorrow—and finally faded into nowhere

Features

THE ETHER VIBRATES ..... **The Editor** 6

VIDEO-TECHNICS ..... **Pat Jones** 9

CURRENT FAN PUBLICATIONS ..... **Jerome Bixby** 144

N. L. PINES, Publisher FANNY ELLSWORTH, Managing Editor
EDWARD R. ROFHEART, Art Director SAMUEL MINES, Editor

Cover Painting by WALTER POPP

STARTLING STORIES. Published every month by Better Publications, Inc., N. L. Pines, President, at 1125 E. Valle Ave., Kokomo, Ind. Editorial and executive offices, 10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y. Entered as second-class matter at the post office at Kokomo, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1953, by Better Publications, Inc. Subscription (12 issues), $3.00; single copies, $.25; foreign and Canadian postage extra. In corresponding with this magazine please include postal zone number, if any. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. March, 1953, issue.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Free Invitation to Riches!

Banish Money Worries

START LIVING!

$100,000 CASH PRIZES

1st PRIZE $50,000.00

The INDEPENDENCE PUZZLE CONTEST

Sponsored by the NATIONAL BOOK CLUB

200 Cash Prizes

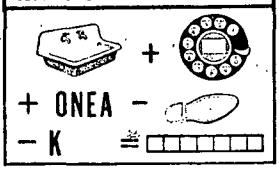
FIRST PRIZE $50,000.00

2nd Prize	$20,000.00
3rd Prize	$6,000.00
4th Prize	$4,000.00
5th Prize	$2,000.00
6th Prize	$1,000.00
7th Prize	$1,000.00
8th Prize	$750.00
9th Prize	$750.00
10th Prize	$500.00
11th through 100th Prizes, each $100	$9,000.00
101st through 200th Prizes, each $50	$5,000.00

GRAND TOTAL OF THIS OFFICIAL PRIZE LIST IS $100,000.00

How To Solve SAMPLE PUZZLE

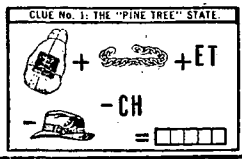
CLUE No. 1: THE "HOOSIER" STATE.



You will see there are a SINK, a DIAL, the SOLE of a shoe and various letters of the alphabet. There are two plus and two minus signs. It is necessary to add and subtract the names and letters as shown by the plus and minus signs. First, write down SINK. Then, add DIAL to it. Next, add ONEA. All this equals SINKDIALONEA. Now, *you must* subtract the letters in SOLE and K. When this is done you are left with INDIANA. Indiana is the Hoosier State, so the result checks with Clue No. 1.

Easy? Yes! Now Solve This Actual Contest Puzzle

CLUE No. 1: THE "PINE TREE" STATE.



Get the Facts FREE! Here's Your Chance of a Lifetime! *ACT NOW!*

What an opportunity for you to get on Easy Street! What a chance to END MONEY WORRIES! Think of it — $50,000 First Prize! — $20,000 Second Prize! Yes — here's your big chance to win more cash than you'd save all your life. The opportunity is YOURS — it's up to YOU to get the facts NOW!

Easy to Enter! Fun to do! No Gimmicks! Only Skill Counts!

The INDEPENDENCE PUZZLE CONTEST is the contest every puzzle-minded person in the country has been waiting for. This contest is sponsored by the National Book Club to introduce its publications to as many new friends as possible. Just look at the SAMPLE PUZZLE at the left. Here is a typical puzzle with every picture easily and quickly identified. Everything open and above board — nothing tricky. That's one big reason you'll agree this is among the fairest, squarest contests ever offered to American puzzle-fans.

Fair and Square — Only Standard Pictures Used! An Amazing New Concept in Puzzles

For the first time in the history of nation-wide contests, the Judges and Sponsor of the INDEPENDENCE PUZZLE CONTEST have decided to take their picture illustrations only from READILY AVAILABLE AND OBTAINABLE SOURCES.

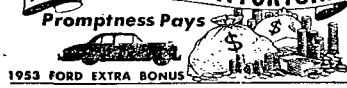
AND MORE! Every solution to every puzzle has a point value according to an error-proof table of letter values. You will know AT ONCE if your answer is right or wrong.

Change Your Life! Win Real Riches!

You owe it to yourself to stop money worries and GET ON THE ROAD TO WEALTH. Think how you could use $50,000 or $20,000! And here's your opportunity. For the price of a postage stamp, we will send you FREE the Entry Form, the Official Rules, the First Series of Puzzles — EVERYTHING you need to enter. So make up your mind now — decide to *win*! Get the facts and MAIL COUPON TODAY!!

ACT TODAY! WIN A FORTUNE

Promptness Pays



1953 FORD EXTRA BONUS

If you mail the coupon postmarked within 10 days from the date you read this announcement, and you enter and win first prize, we will award a special extra promptness bonus of a brand-new 1953 FORD Convertible.

HURRY! $50,000 May Be Yours! MAIL COUPON NOW!

FREE INFORMATION — MAIL COUPON TODAY!

INDEPENDENCE PUZZLE CONTEST, Inc.
P.O. Box 911, General Post Office, Brooklyn 1, N. Y.

I want full particulars about the $100,000 INDEPENDENCE PUZZLE CONTEST. Please mail me FREE the Official Entry Form, Rules, and First Series of Puzzles.

NAME_____

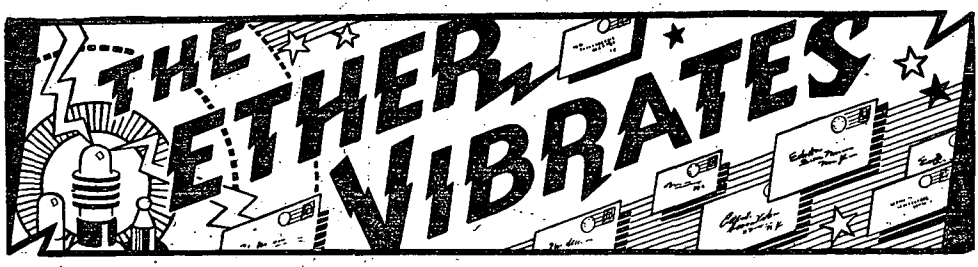
ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ (Add Zone, if any) STATE_____

☐ Check this box if you are mailing this coupon within 10 days from the date you first read this announcement.

PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY TFG

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



HAVE you reserved your Moon ticket at the Hayden Planetarium? Are you looking forward to the trip?

Don't pack your bags . . . there may be a slightly longer wait than anticipated.

A slight difference of opinion among the experts developed at the Second Symposium on Space Travel held recently at the Hayden Planetarium.

Dr. Wernher von Braun, the glamor boy of the rocket men, was enthusiastic and optimistic. It was his conviction that we would have an artificial satellite in the sky probably within twenty-five years, and soon after, naturally, space travel.

Fight Those Bugs!

Milton W. Rosen, Director of the Viking Rocket Project of the Naval Research Labs, was far more pessimistic; in fact von Braun's high-pressure approach seemed to disturb him, although he was much too polite to make it obvious. Space travel is further away, Mr. Rosen insisted. There are too many unsolved problems, too many things we do not know about space and what it may do to the human body. For any nation to rush prematurely into a space operation now may do the whole project incalculable harm and set us back instead of advancing us. Let's go slowly, he urged. Let's try to lick all the troublesome bugs before we dash headlong into so great a mystery and court a possible disaster.

With such conservatism, von Braun was respectfully scornful. Yet Murray Leinster, sitting next to us and listening intently, shook his head and said, "The more I think about it the more impressed I am with what Rosen says. And I'll bet that in spite of his apparent conservatism, if you came to him with a new idea, he would be more receptive and more willing to give it a try."

Writing in the *Saturday Review of Literature,* Peter Ritner calls von Braun a "treasure we spirited out of Germany . . . one of the most imaginative engineers alive." He forgives him freely for his part in the V-2 program which reduced London to a shambles, calling him "too expensive" a human being to be penalized for mere shifts in national politics.

Ivory-Tower Scientist

This conclusion is reached apparently not out of indifference to the horrors of the V-2 raids but from reading von Braun's own work, which reveals him as something of the ivory-tower scientist perched high above such minor vagaries as war and politics. Von Braun refers to wars as he does to meteor showers and "piously hopes for neither."

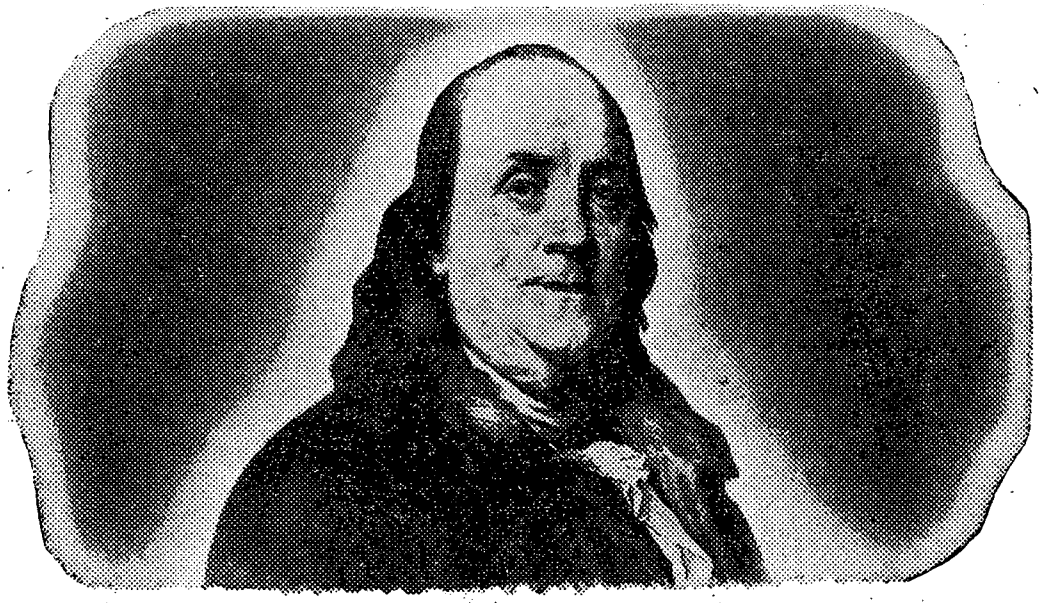
Granted that this is apology of a high order, more realistic persons may be less willing to forgive von Braun for his indifference to such a minor thing as war but yet be cynically willing to use him for their own purposes. This much is certain: if we did not get him the Russians would have, and so there is hardly any choice.

Much of the Symposium was taken up with the material you have already seen in *Collier's* and the book which grew out of that earlier symposium—*Across the Space Frontier.* Added to it were new viewpoints, including a discussion of ship-to-planet communication by our own George O. Smith. With slides illustrating his equations, George worked out the mathematics of the power required to operate a transmitter from Earth to the Moon

(Continued on page 126)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WHAT SECRET POWER DID THIS MAN POSSESS?



Benjamin Franklin
(A Rosicrucian)

WHY was this man great? How does anyone—man or woman—achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life! Benjamin Franklin—like many other learned and great men and women—was a Rosicrucian. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) first came to America in 1694. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

The Rosicrucians
SAN JOSE • (AMORC) • CALIFORNIA

THIS BOOK FREE!

Write for YOUR FREE COPY of "The Mastery of Life"—TODAY. No obligation. No salesmen. A nonprofit organization. Address: Scribe P.A.H.

SEND THIS COUPON

Scribe P.A.H.
The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)
San Jose, California

Please send me the *free* book, *The Mastery of Life*, which explains how I may learn to use my faculties and powers of mind.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____

ZONE_____ STATE_____

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOW--Save Money And Insure Delivery Right To Your Door By Subscribing To RANCH ROMANCES Today!

The next sixteen issues (32 weeks) of RANCH ROMANCES would cost you $4.00 at the regular single copy price. But, by entering your subscription now at the special introductory rate of sixteen issues for only $3.00, you save a *full dollar!*

And that's not all! In addition to this big 25% saving, you'll enjoy the convenience of having copies of each issue delivered right to your door. And instead of *paying* extra money for this service, you *pocket* a dollar.

No other magazine in the field gives you SO MUCH — stirring, thrill-a-minute fiction (including at least one novel and many short stories in every issue)... daring tales of romance... true yarns of the Old West... regular round-ups of Western movies and movie stars written by the famous actor, ROBERT CUMMINGS... rodeo reports... and SCORES of other exclusive features.

Don't miss this opportunity to start RANCH ROMANCES coming your way regularly at BIG savings. Fill out and mail the coupon below today!

Your INSURANCE Policy

By subscribing to RANCH ROMANCES, you not only save $1.00 over the single copy cost of sixteen issues, but you insure yourself against missing a single issue due to newsstand sellouts . . . and you protect yourself against possible price increases as well.

RANCH ROMANCES • *10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.*

Yes, I want to take advantage of your money-saving offer! Here's my $3 for a 32 week introductory subscription (16 big issues) to RANCH ROMANCES.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....**Zone**.....**State**.....

STS-3

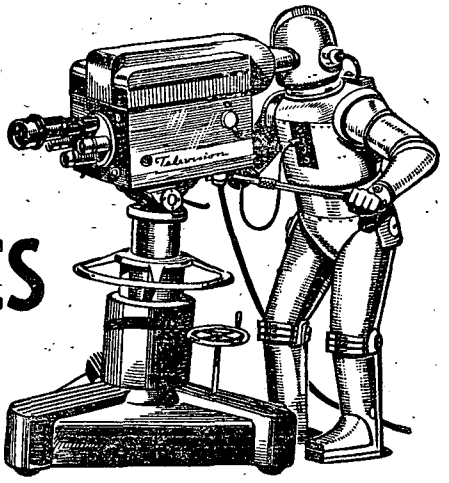
(Add 50¢ for Canadian postage; $1.00 for foreign)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Drama of Science

VIDEO-TECHNICS

by PAT JONES



ON A BUDGET so slim it makes that of the average fan magazine look like a Hollywood extravaganza, "The Johns Hopkins Science Review" has been turning out some of the most fascinating shows to be seen on television. They have even demonstrated that you can live upside down.

Originating at WAAM, Baltimore, and carried over the Du Mont Web, the Review is seen in 24 American cities and Toronto and Montreal.

Lynn Poole, Director of Public Relations at Johns Hopkins, and the program's host and moderator, writes the show which bridges the gap between the curious layman and the scientific researchers in the laboratories. Running the scientific gamut from astro-physics to zoology, the show's casts are recruited entirely from experts in their fields. Mr. Poole says that "what they lack in talent, they make up for in authority." To get their ideas across, they co-operate in simplifying and dramatizing their subjects to make their material interesting TV fare.

Warns moderator Poole: "If you can't show it, don't talk about it longer than a minute."

Following this advice, the atomic chain reaction was explained by one hundred cocked mouse traps going off in succession, the vacuum tube by utilizing a glass jar of puffed wheat. And once the medical diagnosis of a patient under X-Ray in the studio was relayed via television from doctors in three different cities.

Last summer, the program offered immediate practical advice: four persons in bathing suits showed the effect the sun had on four different types of skin, and how to avoid sunburn in each case.

In October, three exceptional programs were the result of Mr. Poole's long interest in space travel. To illustrate the facts and theory of space travel on a low budget, Mr. Poole and his aides, Robert Fenwick, Warren Wightman and Paul Kane, had to exercise considerable ingenuity.

Weightlessness was one of the most interesting problems demonstrated. The Johns Hopkins campus photographer went to the local YMCA where a young acrobat performed on a trampoline. The camera was set so that each time the man bounced from the trampoline and turned and twisted, the camera caught him. The bits of turning and twisting gave a continuous action picture of a man floating in space. Total cost? Negligible.

It was also demonstrated that despite weightlessness, men can carry on all physiological functions while out in space. Gravity has nothing to do with eating, drinking, the heartbeat or the flow of blood.

The programmers found an eight-year-old girl who can stand on her head, drink from a glass and eat crackers. So they stood her on her head while the audience watched a glass of chocolate milk disappear as she drank it! So much for that—you *can* live upside down!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a novel by SAM MERWIN, JR.

Centaurus

Through space and time came the Flying Saucers in the most exciting manhunt ever known!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I

I MUST have shifted in my seat without knowing it as the bomb went off. While the blinding sphere of pure light faded, followed by the irridescent uprush of unleashed matter that made the ominous, mushroom-shaped cloud, I felt my trousers snag, then rip on the jagged end of a broken spring that had chosen that moment to stab its way through the chair-cover.

There is something about the sight of an atomic blast, even on a screen, that inspires humility—uneasy humility. The fact that men who eat and sleep and catch cold and are disappointed in love have been able to master such elementary power is awe-inspiring. The fact that to date the chief use to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which they have put their mastery is destructive makes all of us uneasy.

But the combination of these emotions is small-change stuff compared to the chagrin of ripping the pants of a new suit the first time you put it on.

For a brief period, while I lifted myself up and felt for the broken spring-end and poked it back under the chair-cover, I paid no attention to the movie I was supposed to be watching. I'd have moved to another seat, of course, if the projection room had not been packed with operatives. So I muttered the usual things under my breath and tried to crowd myself against one side of the seat, where the spring-end would be unlikely to do further damage.

An incredulous murmur swept through the audience and brought me back to the screen. For a little while I forgot about my torn pants.

The dust that followed the explosion had settled—and the damned thing was still there!

It was sitting on the blasted ground, perky as you please, in the center of a circle of utter destruction. All around it grass and trees had been blown to nothingness. Beyond the range of the camera, I knew, woodland and underbrush were ablaze. But that stinking linen-colored Saucer looked like a car that had just been simonized.

The screen went blank, and the lights went on. Ford Whalen got up and stood in front of us. He said, "Well, men, now you've seen it. You know as much as any of us. We don't yet know a damned thing about the crew, or if they are vulnerable to our weapons. But we do know there's nothing we can do to hurt that ship of theirs...."

Looking around me I could see the others were scared as I was. Luke Johnson's jaws were clamped so tight he had forgotten to chew his gum. On the other side of me Nick Ronzetti looked like a statue—with a toothpick suspended halfway to his mouth. Faraday, sitting a row in front of me, had to strike three matches before he could get his cigarette going.

OUTSIDE the projection room, while we hung around waiting for our assignments and briefing, the boys pretended it hadn't scared them. Red Dickenson said, "There was something wrong with that bomb. I was out at Los Alamos last year for the tests and they were a lot brighter than that one. I'll give odds they dropped a magnesium flare by mistake."

"Sure," Luke Johnson chimed in, "This whole thing is part of a super-colossal build-up for that new Hollywood epic—*Look, Ma, I'm a Flying Saucer.*" He turned to me, still sarcastic, and said, "What gives with the new suit, Avon? Somebody been sweetening your private till?"

I looked around furtively and told him to shut up, added, "You don't have to broadcast it, Luke. After all, a man's private life...." I was standing against the wall, not sure whether the skirt of my jacket covered the tear or not. It *was* a good-looking suit—a nailhead sharkskin I'd forked over ninety-two bucks for. If you're a bachelor, you can buy a suit like that once in a while, even on a government salary. Moe O'Brien, the tailor, had promised me it would wear like iron, but he hadn't guaranteed it against rips from a wild seat-spring in the F.B.I. projection room.

Luke grunted approval as he rubbed the lapel between thumb and forefinger. Then he said, "On almost anybody else it would look good." Luke has four kids and a mother-in-law and doesn't draw a dime more than I do. I didn't mind his ribbing. As a matter of fact I was grateful for it, and so was everyone else in the room.

We were up against the impossible, and we all knew it.

I was the next to the last guy to be called in for briefing, so it was four

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

o'clock before Ford called me into his office. He looked at his wristwatch as I came in and said, "I meant to give you more time, Avon, but we're behind schedule already. I want you to be on the five o'clock plane for New York."

I restrained a beef and sat down carefully. It looked as if I was going to have to take off on my assignment, whatever it was, without getting my pants fixed. Ford may have been running late, but as usual he was slow getting started.

Ford has always been like that—he has to marshal his thoughts before he can weigh anchor. Back home in high school he'd been canned as quarterback of the football team because he took so much time deciding what play to call that the team was always being penalized for taking too long in the huddle.

He's a little guy—little and chunky and aggressive. If he hadn't gone into the F.B.I. when he got out of college I

don't suppose I'd ever have thought of joining. As usual, though, I followed along. The odd part of it was that we've never liked each other very much. I think Ford is too bound by the book, and he thinks I'm a sentimental slob. I've got a hunch we're both right.

Finally he said, "What do you know about Gerry Marcel?"

I said, "Huh?" and he looked down his broken nose at me. I managed to unscramble some fugitive memories and said, "You mean that Wall Street big shot who killed Marcus Offord and disappeared? What's he got to do with this?"

"Probably nothing," Ford told me. "But we've got to follow every lead, no matter how foolish it looks." I shivered and waited for him to say, "We must leave no stone unturned." He said it.

I waited him out and he finally said, "I want you to find Gerry Marcel—or if he's dead, I want to know it."

"What the hell," I countered, "we've got a file on him, haven't we?"

"We had a file on him," Ford corrected quietly. There was another pause while we both thought that over. F.B.I. files are supposed to be inviolate, but once in a great while—well, people *are* human, unfortunately. What it meant was that Gerry Marcel must have had some very important and powerful supporters who were interested in seeing that the F.B.I. had nothing on him.

"You may not know it," said Ford, and his voice like his face became harsh, "but I was looking into Marcel when he killed Offord. It was probably the one good thing the guy ever did."

"He was never sentenced, was he?" I asked.

FORD pressed his lips together, and worked his jaw back and forth. Then he said, "Marcel never served a day. Don't ask me what happened. Two hours after he killed Offord I was on my way to Okinawa to check on a war-surplus fraud."

"Like that, eh?"

"Like that!" said Ford, closing the book on his own frustration. I had a hunch that, if I found Marcel, he was going to be in for an unpleasant time. Maybe I don't like Ford much, but he's honest and he hates like hell the thought of corruption in high places. He's an ulcer type.

He said, "There are a lot of things about Gerry Marcel we never did find out. We've never seen his birth certificate. All we know is that Philip Coleman sponsored him when he turned up, back in nineteen forty-eight."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I wish I'd had a sponsor like that," I said wistfully. Coleman could have traded dough with the Rockefellers and neither side would have lost. But Coleman was a lot more than just a rich man. He was one of the ablest inventors since Edison.

"Coleman wasn't too happy about it," said Ford. "He shot himself when he found out Marcel was romancing his wife. She inherited all the dough and that was what gave Marcel his start."

"How does he figure in this?" I asked for the second time. By "this," of course, I meant the alien spaceship sitting in the middle of that blasted half-mile circle of Virginia's red soil.

"I don't know that he does," Ford told me. "But like I just said, we must leave no stone unturned. And there are a couple of stones that might pay off. We've got to be thorough. Remember, we don't know a damned thing about who or whatever landed in that Saucer except that they claim to be alien, and they're definitely not friends."

I thought about what we'd learned in the projection room about the visitors who had landed in the Saucer. I said, "What do they mean—demanding we turn over control of all our mines to them? How in hell did they think we'd take it—lying down?"

"If they're aliens, they wouldn't figure," Ford told me. "But that's not our problem—it's up to the President. Doesn't the place they landed mean anything to you?"

"What was the name—Broad Acres?" I asked. "Never heard—" I shut up and did some thinking as the wheels began to turn. "Hey, wasn't that Philip Coleman's estate?"

Ford smiled thinly and said, "That will get you A for effort, Avon. Yeah, it was poor Doc Coleman's place. His widow sold it a couple of years after he killed himself."

"During the Gerry Marcel mess?" I asked.

He nodded and told me, "Another A. But that's just background stuff. And here's some more. Right after World War II, Philip Coleman was working on some real hush-hush stuff. According to the dope I have, he was even sinking a few millions of his own into it. Something along the lines of those early radar-to-the-Moon stunts, but wackier.

"There was a rumor around he was on the trail of something that would beat the speed of light." Ford motioned me to silence and went on, "I didn't say it worked or that I believed it—I only heard a whisper or two at the time. Opinion, such as there was, was that it was screwy as hell, but that if anybody could do it, Coleman was it."

"I never heard that one," I said when he paused, "but I was still M.P.-ing in Austria right after the war."

"Not many people did hear about it," Ford told me. "But they must have thought they had something. A hell of a lot of dough went down the drain on that one—Doc Coleman's *and* the taxpayers'! Back in the winter of forty-seven they tested it and blew out a major power line. Right after that the whole thing was dropped."

"Sounds crazy," I said. "Faster than light—no thanks! Besides, where's the tie-in with our visitors in the Saucer, outside of them coming down on what used to be Coleman's estate?"

"This is going to sound crazier yet," said Ford, pushing a gum eraser across the blotter in front of him with the tip of his pencil. "When the experiment failed, Coleman sent all his scientific help and most of his house staff packing. All we found out was that at the time of his suicide, Gerry Marcel was a house-guest in the manor house."

"Coleman tries to beat the speed of light and comes up with a character named Gerry Marcel?" I asked rhetorically. "It don't add."

"You're telling me!" Ford exploded. "Of course it don't add! But we've got to make it add. We couldn't get at Marcel after the Coleman suicide—Coleman's widow had friends. And after the Marcus Offord murder, Marcel had his own friends to cover for him."

"What about the faithless wife?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FORD drew the eraser back to his edge of the blotter and began to push it all over again. "She's a dish," he said. "Not my type or yours, but a real dish. Exotic type. Her mother married one of those ancient Italian noble families and she's the result. Her maiden name was Raimonda di Cuzzicuzzucco—hell, I don't remember the last name. She's one of those Mediterranean types that look like Cleopatra was supposed to, and probably didn't."

"She seems to have made an impression on you," I told him.

He cussed me out for a good ten seconds for that. I got the impression that she'd scared the hell out of him. And while Ford was no ladies' man, he wasn't a guy women scared easily. He said, "Avon, she's the wickedest living creature, male or female, I ever met. Yet I can see why Coleman married her. What I can't see is why she married him. Why, she had plenty bucks of her own and he must have been thirty years older." He shrugged and gave it up.

"Okay," I said, "I'll keep a couple of weather eyes out for her. Is she still with Marcel?"

"Probably," Ford replied. "We've lost track of her, too—she disappeared when he did. But it's Marcel we want. And he can't cover up now—not with that damned Saucer sitting in Virginia, refusing to blow up when it's A-bombed.

"Now here's the real tie-in. A few months after he canned his staff, Doc Coleman surprised everybody by publishing a little paper on the proper colloquial pronunciation of Ancient Latin."

"I never knew Doc Coleman was a dead language expert," I said, wondering what-the-devil.

"Neither did anyone else," Ford told me. "What's more, while the boys tried to let him down gently on account of his rep, they claimed he was all wrong. If anyone else had printed it, he'd have been a laughingstock."

"Maybe the experiment drove him daffy when it failed," I suggested. I couldn't think of any other reason why one of the foremost scientists of our century should suddenly switch his interest from electronics to Ancient Latin.

"Maybe . . ." Ford's hesitation and tone surprised me. I waited until he added, "on the other hand, it wouldn't be the first time the experts were a hundred per cent wrong."

"Yeah," I began, "but how and why should Philip Coleman—"

Space Opera à la Merwin

THE silence which followed Sam Merwin's resignation as editor of TWS and SS has finally been broken by the clatter of typewriter keys. Always a prolific writer, even when holding down a full-time job, Merwin finds it no particular strain to write for half a dozen fields and still devote a large share of his attention to science fiction.

CENTAURUS is space opera—likely a wise choice for a re-opening gambit, since space opera seems to please more people more times than practically any other type. Also completed are two new novels, one a sequel to his immensely popular HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS, the other an experiment in his springboard theory of science fiction which many of you have doubtless seen him discuss. Merwin the editor you know. Now meet Merwin the writer.

—The Editor

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He cut me off. He wasn't listening. He said, "There was a fellow he kept referring to in his article—he claimed some undiscovered fragments of colloquial Latin of the first century had fallen into his hands. This character's name was Germanicus Titus Marcellus."

Ford looked at me, waiting for it to sink in. It did, finally. I gaped and said, "Germanicus whatever-it-is—sounds a lot like a Latinized version of Gerry Marcel, doesn't it?"

"I thought of that when I was looking into him," Ford told me grimly. "I even dug around in the Library of Congress. Believe it or not, Avon, there *was* a character of that name. Held a consulship under Claudius and campaigned along the Rhine and in Africa. When he was about thirty-two, he disappeared. According to the records, he was probably assassinated by political enemies."

I would have thought Ford had flipped his lid if everything else that was happening wasn't equally crazy. So all I said was, "Are you trying to tell me this Gerry Marcel is a time-traveler from the Rome of the Caesars?"

"I'm not trying to tell you anything, Avon," he told me patiently. "I don't *know* anything! But I'm sure as hell going to find out—sure as God made little green apples!"

"Why so hot about this Marcel character?" I asked him. "You still sore because he had enough pull to get you sent to Okinawa?"

He gave me a crooked smile. "Maybe—a little," he told me. "But that's not the big pitch. You didn't hear anything but a transcription in English of the negotiations between Government and the Saucer lads."

"I got that!" I said. I almost added something about getting a rip in my pants, too, but decided against it. Some fine day, maybe Ford Whalen would occupy that defective seat. And maybe *he'd* be wearing a new suit. It was a pleasing thought.

He brought me back to earth with, "Our visitors aren't talking English, Avon. They're using a sort of vulgar Latin that has our scholarly profs chewing their beards—and it's the same kind of Latin, syllable for syllable, that Doc Coleman tried to sell these same profs a half-dozen years ago!"

II

AT SIX o'clock, torn pants and all, I was sitting in a half-empty Convair, coming into La Guardia. Even in good weather—and the twilight sky was clear as a watch crystal that evening—that low approach makes me jumpy. I always think we're going to hit the water. So I concentrated on what I had to do in New York.

I'd asked Ford why he hadn't put a local operative on the Manhattan leads. His reply had been simple—everyone in the New York office was loaded down with more assignments than they could carry. Even though the story of the Saucer landing in Virginia had not officially been released, it was too big to clamp under for long.

The papers and radio and television were co-operating, of course—they had to—but the rumors kept flying. The result was an explosive situation, not only in New York but all over the country. So I was on my own when it came to finding out the whereabouts, or the fate, of Gerry Marcel.

I had only two leads to follow—so far. The first, and most important, was Donald Parton, Ph.D. Parton had been Philip Coleman's right bower during the Virginia experiment. Afterward, he'd gone back to the Atomic Energy Commission, where he'd come from originally. He'd quit the government in 1953 to take a fat job with a civilian research project. He was hot stuff scientifically but clean as a whistle otherwise. Married to the daughter of a Midwestern college president, had two kids close to their teens and a home on Beekman Place.

He was my first target. I called his apartment from La Guardia. A woman with a pleasant voice answered, and told me he was staying at the laboratories overnight but would be in his office in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the morning. No concealment, not even a question as to who I was. There, I thought, is a dame with a clear conscience.

I looked around for a tailor shop at the airport, but couldn't find one. So I rode into the city sitting on my ripped pants in the back of a cab. I told the driver to stop at any clothing repair shop he saw on the way, but they were all closed.

My second lead lived on West Eleventh Street, in Greenwich Village. Her name was Marcia Gannett and, like Parton, she wasn't in. She lived in a one-time brick mansion that had been divided up into apartments. There was a bell for the superintendent, and I rang it.

A lanky needle-nosed character in khaki shirt and pants answered it. He peered at me with red-rimmed eyes, and asked me what I wanted. I asked for Miss Gannett and he said, "She'll be at Harry's Inn about now. It's that place on the corner with the blue neon sign."

I thought, everyone was sure being helpful—except about fixing my pants. So I thanked him and went over there. The bartender was a large character with a dirty apron. He said, in an Irish brogue, "If it's Marcia ye want, she'll be at Mike's Tavern now. Turn south on Seventh and ye can't miss it. It's in the next block."

IT WAS—and so was Marcia Gannett. The picture I'd seen of her was taken ten years ago, and I expected the worst. But Marcia was still uncommonly attractive. She was on our cards as an alcoholic, but from fifteen feet away she looked as if she'd just come to town from her college daisy chain.

She was tailored and neat, with a crisp white shirtwaist and a green ribbon at the neck that went with her eyes and contrasted with her hair. And even in a suit, she had a figure. She was arguing with the bartender about the merits of a horse due to run at Jamaica on the morrow. I edged closer for a better look.

From six feet off, the bloom had gone. She was still a good looking woman. But she looked as if she'd been wind-burned by life. There were little sharp lines around her eyes and the corners of her mouth, and her skin was getting coarse. In another ten years, I thought, it would be mottled. Still, she was holding her own.

She had a husky voice she probably wasn't born with, and she was laughing a little too much. After a while the bartender came over and I ordered a beer. She looked me over and I said, "Drink up, miss." She hesitated, then shrugged and finished her Scotch and soda. The bartender refilled for her from a bottle already on the bar.

I moved over to the next stool and put it to her. I said, "I came up from Washington especially to talk to you."

She looked me over again, this time with her mind on the job. Whatever else she may have been, Marcia Gannett was not dumb. She said, "Gerry Marcel's dead." Her voice was flat as linoleum.

I said, "How do you know? Did he tell you?"

She said, "I'd know if he was still alive."

I started to tell her there was no way of being sure, but decided against it. It might make her sore and unwilling to talk. After a while I stood her another drink. She downed it and said, "What the hell! You make me nervous, sitting there busting with questions. Get a bottle and come on *up to my place.* I'll try to answer them."

We did just that and went back to the ex-mansion on West Eleventh. All the talking Gannett did on the way was in the liquor store on Seventh Avenue. And all she said there was, "Teacher's, Joe," to the pasty-faced clerk behind the counter.

She had two big high-ceilinged rooms —half the ground floor—with a half-pint kitchen and a full-sized bathroom facing each other between them. The yard in back was split lengthwise by what looked like a spite fence. All that was growing in Marcia's side was dirt—the top of the fence was lousy with hydrangeas in bloom on the other side.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marcia came back and saw me looking at it. She had taken off her jacket and her white shirtwaist was pleasantly filled. She was smoking a cigarette. She said, gesturing toward the fence, "The damfools never heard of a florist's shop. They have to grow their own."

It was a screwy remark. I ignored it, and took a look at the room I was standing in. It was a pleasant enough room if you like them old-fashioned. What's more, it was clean. But the pictures on the walls were the damnedest designs I ever saw. They looked like machinery or skeletons of buildings, except that they weren't. Gannett pushed at a switch, and the light showed them to be in all kinds of weird bright colors.

MARCIA was watching me, and while her face was straight I got an impression she was laughing inside. I looked around again—and saw the flowers. There must have been six vases in the room—roses and gladioli and peonies and lilacs and a couple I couldn't place. They were all arranged so that their blossoms would face the wall!

"Everybody paints blossoms," said Gannett, as if to put me out of my misery. "I paint the structure of flowers."

I got what the pictures were then, all right. Come to think of it, Gannett was on our record as having been a fashion artist before Gerry Marcel picked her up. Since then she was just down as a lush. I looked at her and wondered just how crazy she was and said, "I suppose you're left-handed too."

SHE shrugged and led the way to the kitchenette. I let her do the honors, and she did use her left hand to uncap the bottle. I felt like Sherlock Holmes for a second, then wondered what in hell I was patting myself on the back for. So she was left-handed—*that* wouldn't find Gerry Marcel.

She poured a couple of real dark drinks and we took them back to the living room. She sat down on a big sofa and swung her legs up and waited till I was in a chair on the other side of the coffee table. Then she said, "All right, soldier, where do we start?"

"I want to know what happened to Marcel," I told her. "That's all I'm here for. Incidentally, the name's Burke—Avon Burke!"

"How swanlike!" she said. She sipped her drink and stared at one of her back-end-to flower paintings. Then she said in a flat voice, "I told you—Gerry's dead. He's been dead a long time."

"Got any proof?" I asked her.

She shrugged. "Enough for me," she told me. "He'd have been in touch if he weren't dead. I was one of his playmates. He liked me." She laughed, and while it wasn't an amused laugh, it wasn't bitter, either.

"What in hell do you mean by that?" I asked her.

"Just what you think I mean," she said, giving me those green eyes head-on. "Gerry needed women—and women needed Gerry. I was one of them." She paused, then added, more to herself than to me, "Sort of an odd thing to happen to a girl like me."

"What sort of a girl are you?" I asked.

She gave me a thoughtful glance. Then she said, "Avon—that's a crazy name, too poetic for you. I'll call you Burke—Burke, I've been a lot of people, like everybody else. By the time Gerry came along I was pretty hot stuff—no dream-boat, but an up-and-coming career kid who got to all the openings and all the best places. Hell, the woods around here are full of them."

She made a derisive gesture and knocked over her glass. I made a move to catch it, but it held nothing but ice. She said, "Get me a refill, Burke. I need it." I went and got her a refill, wondering how long she could last. Mine wasn't a quarter empty.

She said, "Gerry made a wreck out of me. He got me so I didn't give a damn about work or getting places or anything else—including any other men. A woman, to him, was sex and laughter and somehow he made that enough for her. He made it enough for me."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What happened?" I asked her.

She shrugged. "I was part of a stable, Burke. I knew it—and I didn't care. But I was the one that got caught. That almond-eyed duchess he married had his key copied and walked in here one night when we were together. Look!"

Without warning, she sat up and pulled her shirtwaist clear of her skirt. She unbuttoned it clear to the neck and untied her green ribbon and took it half off. She wasn't wearing a bra, and she didn't need one. She half twisted to show me a purple-red two-inch scar that spoiled the smooth cream of her flesh just under her rib-cage.

She expected me to do something, so I leaned across the coffee table and poked at it with the tips of my fingers. I could feel the hollowness beneath it. I said, "What did she use, Gannett?"

Marcia got up, without a trace of unsteadiness. She went into the bedroom in front, and came back with her blouse still swinging free and tossed a stiletto onto the table. She said, "If that dame ever comes in here again I'll use it on *her!* I damn near died of that cut."

I PICKED up the dagger and hefted it. It was a beautiful weapon, a poniard with a jeweled silver cross-hilt and a slim deadly glittering blade. It looked like an antique to me—but one with plenty of slaughter still left in it. It was never designed to be a paper-cutter. I said, "We don't have that little hassle on our records."

"You're damned well right you don't," she told me, putting down her empty glass. "Gerry patched me up. I nearly died, but that dagger made me a rich woman. Now I don't care who knows, Gerry's dead. So is any scandal that might have come out of it."

"What makes you so sure he's dead?" I asked, trying not to look at the fine fullness of her breasts.

"Need another refill," she said, and for the first time there was a trace of thickness to soften the hoarseness of her voice.

I went and got it—I had an idea she wouldn't talk at all if I didn't. When I came back she said, "Your pants are torn."

I said, "You're telling me! I've got news for you. I already know it, but what I want to know is how you know Gerry's dead."

"You want to know—so what?" She eyed me over the rim of her glass, drank and said, "Okay, I'll tell you. After the thing here, Gerry got in that Offord mess. He had to disappear. He came back, just once before he left. He told me he'd call once a month, at a certain time."

She began to look a little too dreamy. I said, "How long did the calls keep coming?"

Her green eyes were slow in focusing on mine. "On the dot till two months ago."

"Maybe he couldn't—maybe he's been sick," I ventured.

Her laugh was derisive. She said, "You wouldn't say that if you'd known him. Gerry couldn't *get* that sick. He isn't—wasn't like other men. Things that bother people like you—and, yes, like me—they didn't bother Gerry. He brushed them off."

Gannett put her glass down on the table a little too hard and the slap of tumbler on mahogany stopped me from losing track of my job. There was a chance that if I could get the time of those monthly calls we might be able to trace them—if they were out-of-town calls. That is, if that part of her story wasn't something she'd dreamed up.

So I asked her and she said, "Why not? You've seen *me.*" She peered down at the scar on her left side. Then, without looking up, she said, "Gerry called me at eight o'clock on the first Tuesday of every month. Does that satisfy you, Burke?"

"Morning or evening?" I asked her.

"Evening!" she said viciously. Then, as I blinked in surprise, "And don't think I don't know this is the night."

Her eyes looked past me toward a corner of the big room. I took my time turning around—hell, I've got my ego to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

consider. On the wall was a big banjo clock with a picture of a square-rigged sailing ship painted on the handle.

It was ticking and the hands were at four minutes to eight.

I looked at my wristwatch. It read six minutes to eight, but it lost a couple of minutes every twenty-four hours and I hadn't wound and reset it for the night. We sat there and waited it out while that damned clock ticked away the seconds, one by one, like a leaky faucet dripping in the kitchen. . . .

OUTSIDE, night had fallen. Through the French windows I could see rectangles of light from the windows of apartment houses that backed up against the fence on the far side of Gannett's yard. There were a couple of radios and television sets playing conflicting musical programs and a whole lot of other people had a raucous news program on.

The whole atmosphere made me think back to being a kid and knowing, without having heard the horns, that a band had passed by a little while before. Only there, in Gannett's apartment, the band hadn't marched by yet.

We were waiting for it.

The clock whirred and Marcia Gannett waited, eyes riveted to the glass in her hand. I waited, not looking at anything much. Maybe this was a wild-goose chase—but I got a picture of the way that damned Saucer had showed on the screen, smug and untouched after the A-bomb went off, and excitement, or maybe fear, plucked at my diaphragm.

The banjo clock began to strike the hour and the radios and TV sets across the yard burst into a mass discord of commercials. It struck eight times, slowly, and nothing happened. And still Gannett waited—and I waited—and the whole room waited.

Still nothing happened. At one minute past, I reached for my glass—and a phone shrilled in the front bedroom. I jumped and knocked over the tumbler. By the time I was back together again Gannett was already staggering, unevenly but swiftly, in answer to the summons that had called her.

When I reached the bedroom, Gannett was sitting on the edge of a huge modernistic low-built double bed, holding a phone to her ear. I was tempted to grab it from her, but something in her expression stopped me. So I stood over her and waited.

She said, "I'm sorry, I gave my television set to a cross-eyed Siamese cat that lives in the basement." She made a move to put the instrument back on its floor cradle, near the head of her bed, but this time I didn't hesitate to grab it.

A professional-sounding female voice said, "I'm sorry if we've disturbed you, madam, but the Markwell Reaction Testing Service is merely fulfilling its function." There was a click and the line was briefly dead. Then the hum of the dial tone came on. It had not been an out-of-town call.

Gannett was lying on top of the bed, her hands clasped beneath the nape of her neck. She was half-grinning at me, but her green eyes were liquid with disappointment. She said, "Satisfied, Burke?"

I shrugged. "Sorry," I told her. I was at that.

She said, "Why don't you forget about your job for a while, Burke. I've got a couple of things I'd like to forget myself."

I looked down at her and she looked up at me. I don't know how I looked to her, but in that quarter light she made a very enticing picture indeed. And, come to think of it, I was hung up on the job until Donald Parton got to his office in the morning from wherever he was spending the night.

I pulled her to me, kissed her. She wasn't exactly fire—but she wasn't ice either. She was soft and firm at once against me, and I thought it wasn't going to be bad at all. The kiss lasted.

Then she pulled clear and her voice was low and shaken and she said, "Get me a cigarette, Burke—no, get me a drink."

I didn't think one more could damage

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He had a shield and sword, and was making threatening gestures

her, so I got myself organized and out to the kitchenette. I had a little trouble getting more ice cubes out of the refrigerator, and I was careful not to make either highball too strong.

But by the time I got back to the bedroom with my hands full of tumblers, Marcia Gannett was snoring gently.

I had my nightcap alone, at Harry's Inn across the street. The TV was on, showing a bad club fight in the suburbs, and I looked the other way until a special bulletin came on.

An announcer bleated, "We have just received a flash from our Washington Bureau that a Flying Saucer landed five days ago in an isolated area of Virginia. According to the same unimpeachable source, the Saucer is of extra-terrestrial origin, and members of its crew are negotiating with the President!"

Well, that was that. As Ford would

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have said, "The fat's in the fire"—or maybe, "The cat's out of the bag for fair."

Me? On the whole I was relieved. I never did like secrets.

III

I WOKE up early the next morning. I felt lousy until I got under the shower and rinsed the cobwebs out of my head.

I remembered I hadn't eaten since lunch the day before. In the rush of getting to New York I'd forgotten about dinner—and the stewardesses hadn't served food on the plane. Mrs. Burke's little boy was hungry.

I'd purposely got me a room in one of those big convention hotels with an all-night valet service so I could get my torn pants fixed. Out of the shower, I went to the inner door and opened it. The pants were there, all right, and the house tailor had done a good job.

I got into them and grabbed the morning paper stuck halfway under the doorsill. I tore the main headline, but it didn't matter. The Virginia Saucer was the story—and I already knew a lot more about that than the editor did.

They had a few facts and a hell of a lot of guesses—but none of them was as wild as what I knew was the truth, though that was little enough. I still didn't know where the damned thing had come from, or why it was where it was. Neither did the newspaper.

I turned on the room television and got some character with a beard and a lisp discussing the possibility our visitors might have come from Mars. I switched channels and got a character with a monocle and a Central European accent, who stated definitely that the Saucer was from Venus. The other channels were worse, so I went on down to the dining room and tried to concentrate on the shellacking the Yankees had given the Senators the night before.

That made me feel so bad I was glad to turn back to the Saucer news, even though it didn't make sense. I ate a half grapefruit, a plate of ham and eggs, some hashed brown potatoes and drank two glasses of iced tea. By the time I had finished, it was past nine o'clock and time to get on my horse.

The research corporation Donald Parton worked for had three floors of offices in one of those green-glass anthills on stainless-steel stilts that have become the rage in Manhattan. I'm not used to looking at them, after all the white pillars in Washington, but the damned things are well planned.

I was whisked up thirty stories in an all-metal elevator etched with modernistic owls, and had to cross a fair-sized putting green of thick carpet before I got to the receptionist. She cocked a shell-pink ear framed with sculptured bronze curls, mumbled something into an office phone of transparent plastic and asked me to wait. Before I could sit down, another babe appeared, complete with smile, and told me Dr. Parton was expecting me. I followed her along a corridor of glass brick to a huge office with raised steel letters on the door that said simply: *Dr. D. PARTON.*

PARTON got up to greet me from behind a desk across another putting green of carpet. He was a skinny, long-faced man who looked to be about twenty-six, but I knew he was older. He was wearing a bow-tie, an old tweed jacket and baggy flannel slacks. He looked about as modernistic as one used carpet slipper. He also looked smart. Hell, he had to be to have been Doc Coleman's right bower.

He shook hands and motioned me to a chair. Offering me a cigarette, he said, "Anne told me you called last night. Sorry I wasn't around." He actually looked apologetic for a moment, then added, "What is it, Mr. Burke—the same old business?"

"Afraid so, Doctor," I told him, "with maybe a couple of new wrinkles." There was something about this guy I liked. He was loaded with class and didn't give a damn about it. I could understand why his wife wasn't afraid of anything.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He looked at a morning paper on one end of his desk and said, "I don't suppose it ties in with this—or does it?"

I shrugged and said, "All I know is I've been asked to find out what's happened to Gerry Marcel. You're the only lead I got."

He looked at me and pursed his lips. Then he looked back at the paper, then back at me. Finally he said, "I probably ought to tell you I know nothing about Mr. Marcel."

"Which means you do know something," I countered.

"Maybe—a little," he said. He frowned and added, "There are a lot of good reasons why I shouldn't talk." He glanced around him at the luxurious surroundings of the joint.

I said, "All right, Doctor—"

He interrupted with, "Don't call me Doctor, please, Mr. Burke. I'm only a Ph.D. They believe in titles around here. It adds prestige—they tell me." This with just a trace of a smile.

So I said, "Listen then—all bets are off. It *may* tie in with that headline on your desk, and it's wide open all the way."

He looked at the paper again and said, "If I thought for a minute that—but it's impossible." He scowled and a scowl looked out of place on his young good-looking face. Then he stared me right in the eye and said, "All right, Mr. Burke, where do you want me to begin."

"At the beginning, I'm afraid," I told him.

He looked away and ran a hand through his short brown hair and said, "You probably know I worked for Dr. Coleman on Project Parsec."

I nodded and said, "How did you get into it, Mr. Parton?"

"By a thesis I wrote at M.I.T. for my degree," he replied. "I had an idea that if we could project a directed atom-smashing impulse above the Heaviside layer we might be able to bounce a beam off a star and get an echo back faster than light. It sounds crazy I know, but it involves a lot of theoretical factors, including the plane and curve of the universe. When I wrote it, Mr. Burke, back in nineteen thirty-nine, I didn't even know we could smash an atom on the ground."

"You're way over my head," I told him, "but isn't there a theory that anything traveling with the speed of light acquires infinite mass?" I felt proud of myself for that one even if I wasn't too sure what it meant.

Donald Parton was not impressed. He ran a hand through his hair again and said, "It does rather knock the spots out of parts of the Einstein theory. Actually, I was only going a step further. Einstein figured that space is curved—I had a screwy student idea that it might fold back on itself an infinite number of times."

HE PAUSED with a sheepish grin and said, "I had a lot of half-baked equations worked out to prove it, but that's the basic idea. I figured they'd probably flunk me for trying it in a thesis. They didn't, so I got my nice new degree and was wondering what brewer would put me to work in his laboratory when I got a letter from Dr. Coleman. It took me all of half a second to give up the atomic structure of yeast in favor of the job he offered me."

"It must have been quite a kick," I said encouragingly.

"It was all of that," he said, again with that sheepish smile. Then his face settled in serious lines that for the first time made him look his age and more. "Dr. Coleman," he went on, "was the greatest man I've ever known. He was very wise and very rich and very learned—but he could be as simple as a child.

"Sometimes I can't believe any of it happened, Mr. Burke. When I finally met Philip Coleman in Washington he was even more enthusiastic than I was. He'd been working on a similiar project along electronic lines and fields of force. Between the two of us, we thought we had something."

"And did you?" I asked him.

He nodded. "We had something,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Burke—but to this day I'm damned if I know what. We had something big—maybe too big. With his money and prestige we got a little backing and went to work. Then, when the war came along, we got a no-ceiling limit and really dug in. The next six years were the hardest working I've ever known."

He paused and I almost said, "And maybe the happiest?" But I didn't. It was there in his face, and didn't need saying.

"I'm not going into all the headaches and technical problems we met along the way," he told me, "but every year the thing got bigger—and more complicated. We gobbled up a lot of the marvelous things Fermi and Oppenheimer and the others were doing on the Manhattan Project—we needed all the help we could get.

"And, of course, there was the problem of power. We needed all we could get and then some, just to get minescular results." He paused to light a cigarette, added, "Dr. Coleman had a special plant built on his estate, but of course it wasn't enough.

"What we were really trying to do was to bounce a bit of atomic fission on top of a radar beam—about eight hundred miles above Earth. And just to make things more difficult, we had to time and direct it so that it would cut through the entirely theoretical folds of the universe in such a way as to by-pass the limit of light-speed. Does that sound complicated, Burke?"

I relaxed and told him, "I'd hate to try to explain it to a six-year-old child—if I had a six-year-old child."

"Well, it was—*is* complicated," he replied. He got up and began to pace along the length of the huge picture window behind his desk. "Among other things, I had to become an astronomer in an effort to calculate such little items as galactic drift and expansion of the universe. And astronomy, being largely observation, was not enough. I had to become a para-astronomer and go by theoretical guesswork—and pray that my theories had some minute fraction of validity.

"If Dr. Coleman hadn't been working with me, night and day, we'd never have gotten anywhere. Oddly enough, he was only a second-rate mathematician. I was the equation boy in the team. But he had a way of getting things done that saved me a thousand times when I was ready to quit."

He said apologetically, "I hope I'm not boring you stiff, Burke, but it's been years since I've talked about Project Parsec to anybody. And you're a good listener."

"It's part of my job," I told him, "but in this instance I find myself liking my work."

"Thanks," Parton said briefly. Then, "When we were stuck for want of some unthought-of type of gadget, Dr. Coleman never failed to come up with it. He was an intuitive thinker—he'd look a problem over, then go somewhere and play golf or something and sleep on it a few times—and then he'd come up with the answer.

"Around V-J Day we made a test—on a microscopic scale. We had to build a sort of miniature universe in a near-vacuum to do it. We needed a catalyst—some sort of definite atomic structure to send out on our ray. Dr. Coleman said that since we were really indulging in alchemy, we might as well start with gold.

"So we ran it off in our home-made universe with a speck of gold. We almost burned out the power plant a couple of times—I'd hate to tell you how many things went wrong—but finally it ran off according to plan."

He paused and I said eagerly, "What happened—did it work?"

PARTON ran his hand through his hair again and said, "It worked—and showed us we had something we hadn't even thought of. Somewhere along the line, magnetism had reared its ugly head and we found we had a sort of tractor beam."

He paused to translate it into the kind

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of basic English I can understand and said, "A tractor beam is a theoretical force-beam or ray that will draw toward its source the object at which it is directed. When we finished the test we weighed our bit of gold, to find out how much it had lost—and found it had *gained* weight! In other words, it had attracted molecules of gold to itself."

I whistled. "Where'd the gold come from?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Who knows?" he countered. "There wasn't enough for anyone to miss. And none of the gold within the range of our test beam had been molecularly weighed. Don't worry, we checked it with other metals—iron, lead, tin, platinum. It drew them all. Then we began testing with non-metallic catalysts—and it worked with them too, though not to so great an extent."

"You mean," I asked him, "that whatever you put into this machine of yours, it drew the same substance?"

"That about sums it up," Parton told me. He stopped pacing and sat down again behind his desk. "You can see what an added responsibility that put on us. We—rather Dr. Coleman, was working on arranging an all-out test. It would have been impossible during the war, thanks to the power we needed, but once Japan surrendered he began to make headway.

"Meanwhile he had doubled his own private power plant's output—but it wasn't close to being enough. We had to have billions of volts to bounce our little beam through the Heaviside layer and get it out into space with enough juice to prove anything. Of course, we were continually running tests in our sample universe. One odd thing happened which we didn't give enough attention at the time."

Again he frowned his unlikely frown, and I said, "I'm all ears, Mr. Parton. Maybe this has nothing to do with Gerry Marcel, but I'm like the woman reading the biography of Napoleon who wouldn't let her friends tell her how the retreat from Moscow came out."

He relaxed and smiled. "You're hardly in a class with that lady, Burke," he said. "Damned few people know anything about this. We kept our real intentions hidden. Thanks to Dr. Coleman's genius as an inventor, we came up with plenty of useful by-lines that kept the authorities satisfied we weren't wasting their money.

"What happened was this. I was running a test with an aluminum-steel alloy and happened to notice a block of pure steel outside our model universe just before I switched on. We knew by then that our beam would cut right through the walls of its own universe and grab the most magnetic element outside within its range, unless it bounced off an equally magnetic element on the way.

"I had the steel out of the path of the beam as I turned the switch—but when I finished the run-through I found the steel-aluminum catalyst had added only molecules of steel to itself." He paused to see whether I understood, and I could only look puzzled.

"Damn it, man!" he exploded. Then, "Sorry, I shouldn't blow my top—but what it meant was a temporal as well as a spatial displacement. In lay lingo, we had some sort of a time beam as well as a tractor. Unfortunately I didn't think of it until later—much later. I merely thought the test had been fouled up. When I ran it again, with the steel out of the way, it worked perfectly."

He lit a fresh cigarette and leaned back in his chair and said, after blowing smoke at the ceiling, "Well, we finally got everything lined up early in 'forty-seven. We had permission to tap the only major power line within thirty miles as long as we made our big run between two and three o'clock on a Sunday morning—the authorities figured we wouldn't shut any industries down if something blew."

"I hear something did," I told him.

He shuddered, said, "Higher than a kite. Dr. Coleman and I ran the big test alone—we hadn't tipped off the staff about it. He came in with the damnedest looking hunk of old junk for a catalyst I'd ever seen. It was a piece of ancient

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Roman armor that had been unearthed during the Anzio bombardments three years before. Somebody had sent it to Mrs. Coleman as a present—she was half-Italian, you know."

"I know," I told him.

"Dr. Coleman explained," Donald Parton went on, "that we did need metal, but that it might be dangerous to employ any type of alloy in use on the world today—just in case. He pointed out that the Roman breastplate was of an alloy out of use for almost two thousand years, even showed me a bit of rotted cloth clinging to it. Well, it was his show, so I told him it was all right with me."

I had been growing increasingly aware of faint sounds of excitement around me—not in that near-soundproof room but drifting in through my nerve-ends and pores, like the band sensation I had felt at Marcia Gannett's the night before.

Dr. Parton's desk phone buzzed gently. He picked it up, listened briefly, his face going white. Then, putting the phone down he jumped to his feet and strode to the window. "Come on, Burke," he said, "the Saucers are over New York!"

IV

THEY were there all right—half a dozen of them. I'd heard about them for years, of course, like everybody else. And like everybody else, or most everybody, I'd had periods of half-believing in them and times when I'd dismissed the whole Saucer idea as a lot of you-know-what. Even that movie I'd seen the afternoon before hadn't seemed quite real—nothing on the screen ever does somehow.

But there they were—six big discs, their outer rims spinning as they moved with majestic insolence down the length of Manhattan Island. They were flying quite low—maybe at about three thousand feet—and while they wobbled a little in flight they were in a perfect V-formation.

Where, I wondered, were the defending jet interceptors? And where were the crews of the AA-batteries at Fort Hamilton and Governor's Island?

Then I knew why our planes and guns were not in action—this squadron of alien spaceships was obviously putting on a show of force—and, just as obviously, orders had come from Washington forbidding any reprisals. I wished to hell we had never dropped that A-bomb if this was the answer.

"Lord!" exclaimed Parton beside me. *"They must be a hundred yards in diameter!"*

Neither of us said anything more. As the Saucers moved out of our range of vision, the scientist went to one end of the picture window and pressed a button. The pane of glass slid slowly back and we stepped out onto the balcony beyond it. We could peer around the corner of the tower of glass and steel and watch the Saucers move on downtown toward the southern tip of the island.

They hovered for a long moment when they reached the bay—then, without warning, and still in formation, they shot straight up at incredible speed. In a matter of seconds they were out of sight. We waited breathlessly for five minutes, but they did not return.

Parton sank shakily into the chair behind his desk. He rested his ashen forehead on the fingertips of one hand. Then, looking up at me, he said, "Where was I? Oh, yes—Dr. Coleman and I were about to run the first full-scale test.

"We locked in the ancient armor and shook hands. We triple-checked everything before we turned on the juice. We had managed to cut in our own power plant to supplement the outside voltage. I think we both did a little praying when we gave her the gun."

"I'm praying right now," I told him, thinking of those six things that had flown so insolently over us minutes before.

"I can understand why," Donald Parton told me, with his crooked sheepish grin. "But we got her going under full power. She had just reached maximum output when our own power plant blew

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a fuse. That overloaded the outside wires and we knocked out the lights all over that part of Virginia.

"It took us half an hour to get going again—and I was outside the experimental chamber when the power came back on," he told me, looking suddenly weary. "The authorities were sore as hell by the time the phone service was working and I had a lot of explaining to do. Dr. Coleman stayed inside with the experiment."

"What happened?" I asked him.

"I wish to hell I knew," Parton replied. "I was still tied up when the light flashed, showing the test had been run. I hung up and raced back to the chamber—it was at the other end of the hall—and there was Dr. Coleman with what looked like a refugee from a masquerade.

"He was wearing a sort of Roman helmet and greaves and sandals, and he had a shield and sword in his hands. He was spouting some sort of gibberish at Dr. Coleman and making threatening gestures. At the time, I thought all we needed was to have a lunatic crash in at that moment. He had his back to me and I picked up a steel bar and laid it alongside his jaw, where his helmet didn't protect him.

"I asked Dr. Coleman where in hell our visitor had come from, and he made a gesture toward the vault in which we had put the old armor. He said, 'He was in there when I opened it up.' I couldn't get another thing out of him. I took my visitor's weapons and helmet away while he was unconscious and looked at him."

"GERRY MARCEL?" I asked when he paused.

Parton nodded. "That's what he called himself later," he said. "He was like a tiger when he came to—weapons or none. He began to shout until he saw we were smoking cigarettes. That seemed to paralyze him, as if he'd never seen a man smoke before—and maybe he hadn't."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"I'm not sure," he said. "But in view of what's happened since I've done a lot of thinking about that time I moved the block of steel before running the alloy test—and the test came out steel. We were dealing with a lot of forces we didn't know a damned thing about—and there's just a possibility. . . ." His voice trailed off.

I put it to him bluntly. "You mean," I said, "You might have come up with some sort of a time machine?"

"It sounds ridiculous," he told me, "but that's exactly what I mean—I don't have your courage to put it into words. But after our visitor stopped threatening us, Dr. Coleman turned to me and said, 'Donald, I'm not sure—but I think I understood a word or two of what this gentleman was just trying to say.' Those were his exact words."

"What happened then?" I asked him.

He shrugged and told me, "From then on everything ran downhill. We got our visitor to the main house and put some clothes on him and got him something to eat. He was wary, watching us like a trapped wild animal that has never seen a human being before. But he ate—how he ate! He used his knife, but no fork or spoon.

"And then Mrs. Coleman woke up and came down to the kitchen to see what was going on." He paused and looked thoughtfully into his memories. "She's a very strange woman, you know."

"I've heard," I told him. "Also that she's a looker."

He gave me an odd look, as if I'd used a dirty word. Then he said, "She's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen—and probably the most repellent. You got the idea that even in passion she'd be cold—but she was fascinating."

"I've heard that said," I put in.

"She and Dr. Coleman were a strange couple," Parton stated thoughtfully. "On the surface they seemed like a mismatch. After all, he was a lot older. But he was the kindest man I've ever known—and Raimonda reacted to kindness like a cat. She purred. I think he just liked to look at her, the way some men like to look at a work of art. He gave her something she needed, and he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was too busy to expect much from her. So, in their own strange way, they got along pretty well for years."

"But the visitor changed all that," I said drily.

Parton looked at me thoughtfully for a moment, then said, "Have you ever poured a third element into a blend of two others and watched the whole mixture change before your eyes? Well, no matter—but it was like that.

"Our visitor muttered something about the food and Raimonda turned into a statue. And then she answered him in kind. I'd heard her speak Italian to Dr. Coleman a number of times—he was very fluent in a half dozen languages, Italian among them—but this was different. She was talking his language!

"It was his turn to stare—and then he put back his shaggy reddish head and laughed. It was a laugh of sheer relief and joy—the laugh of the stranded traveler who finds, among foreigners, someone who speaks his language. But it was more than that. There was a sort of fierce animal joy that was—well, almost savage.

"Dr. Coleman beamed. He turned to Raimonda and said, 'I thought so—it's incredible!' But his wife didn't answer him. Why, she didn't even hear him. She was devouring the stranger with her eyes as if she had never seen a man before.

"Her hardness seemed to melt as she looked at him. I had the feeling that things were going tragically wrong just then. After a while I went out and took a walk in the rain—did I mention it was raining? When I got back to the house all the lights were out except in the hall. I saw no one else as I went to my room."

"What happened afterward?" I asked him.

HE HESITATED, then said, "Burke, I'm damned if I know. Until that night I'd been almost like a member of the family. The next day I was on the other side of an asbestos curtain. Dr. Coleman had a talk with me the following morning. He suggested that in view of what had happened he wanted my promise not to discuss the experiment with anyone until he gave me word.

"Naturally I was puzzled, but I agreed. Then he said he had already been in touch with Washington and that Project Parsec was discontinued as a peril to public utilities. I was completely baffled. But I went ahead and dismantled the laboratory and paid off the staff. Then Dr. Coleman arranged for this job I have now."

"Just what do you do here?" I asked him.

"Oh—" he toyed with his desk lighter, "I'm making a study of molecular fatigue in used metals employed in metallic alloys. It's a mighty interesting subject."

"But a bit of come-down maybe?" I put in.

"What do you think?" he countered, his face grave.

"Did you see much of Gerry Marcel after that first night?" I inquired.

He hesitated again. "Oh, I saw him at meals occasionally," he said finally. "The situation was developing apace, as they used to say. I wondered how Dr. Coleman was taking it—but he seemed more like an interested observer than a concerned party. Gerry—he was already calling himself Gerry Marcel—was making tremendous progress. He was—is—a hell of an attractive fellow in a frightening sort of way. And Raimonda was vibrating like a tuning fork.

"But, as I just said, Dr. Coleman didn't seem to mind. He didn't even seem to mind that the experiment was called off, right on the brink of success. As a matter of fact, I'm pretty sure he had a hand in killing it. He had enough money and influence to fight it through if he'd wanted to."

"That doesn't add," I said.

He shrugged.

"Did you ever see Dr. Coleman again after you left Virginia?" I asked.

"Once," he said. "It was late the following October, just a few weeks before he—died. He was all wrapped up in that Latin booklet of his—you'd have thought he'd never heard of Project Parsec."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"By the way, what is a parsec?" I wondered out loud.

"It's a space-time unit of measurement—astronomers use it for measuring vast distances. In space, it amounts to about thirteen trillion miles. Dr. Coleman used the name for our project because we were trying to cover a few parsecs with our beam.

"But to get back to our last meeting," he went on, "Dr. Coleman looked happy as a kid. He was worried about me and wanted to know how I was getting along in my new work. He was full of plans to overthrow the entire framework of classical language traditions."

"He didn't impress you as a man likely to kill himself because his wife was having an affair with Gerry Marcel?" I asked.

"Definitely not!" was the reply. "That's why I couldn't believe it was suicide. Are you fellows sure it was?"

"We're sure," I told him. This seemed to depress him.

He turned the table lighter on its sight, then stood it upright again. Then he said, "If he killed himself—and I've no proof that he didn't—I don't think Dr. Coleman did it because of Raimonda."

This was getting a bit deep for me again. Then I said, "Why do you think he might have killed himself?"

"Well—" Donald Parton hesitated again. Finally he said, "I know it sounds crazy—but Dr. Coleman shot himself just one week after Kenneth Arnold reported seeing the first Saucer in the Northwest. It was just a wacky idea I never gave much thought to. But in view of your coming here, I'm wondering if just maybe there isn't some connection."

"It's wacky, okay," I told him, "but it's a pretty fair odds-on bet you're right. You think Dr. Coleman felt this Project Parsley, or whatever it was, brought the Saucers to Earth?"

"I don't know," he told me. "But we were fooling around with some tremendous cosmic force. Who knows what might have happened? We pulled in a man who belonged in ancient Rome. Maybe we pulled in the Saucers too!"

I decided it was time to switch subjects. I said, "A while ago you said Gerry Marcel *was* something—then you changed it to *is*. Why? Do you have any idea he's still alive?"

"Damned if I know," he replied wretchedly, again running fingers through his short hair. "God knows I had enough trouble after the Marcus Offord murder. I thought for a while it was going to cost me my job here. This is strictly a Caesar's wife outfit. But the investigation stopped just in time."

"Did you ever see Marcel after you left Virginia?" I asked him.

"That's the odd part of it—I did," Parton told me. "He actually looked me up once when he and Raimonda came to New York to live after Dr. Coleman's suicide. He seemed to want to show off his new twentieth-century veneer. In some ways he was like a child—a thoroughly charming, pathological *enfant terrible*."

"And—after that?" I inquired.

HIS thin face settled into grave lines again as he looked down at his desk blotter. Then he said, "I'm not sure. I didn't see him after his visit—I was in the throes of being a new-minted bridegroom, and I didn't want to drag up any of the old mess. I didn't think Anne—my wife—would have liked it, and I didn't know her well enough then to explain. Ever been married, Burke?"

"Not to speak of," I told him.

"Well," he said, "it's a job in itself. But that's not the case at point. About three months ago—make it ten weeks or so, Anne dragged me out to dinner with some friends of hers. She roomed with Mrs. Larkin at Miss Porter's School or something. I'm not much of a night owl, I'm afraid, but once in a while I give in and go along."

"The Larkins are very gay. They do a lot of entertaining. Anyhow, we all went to dinner at Twenty One and then to the theater—a real night on the town. Then they insisted we go to some trap way over on the East Side to look at a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dancer. Name of Giselle—a brunette witch with a slither. You know the sort of thing. Half flamenco, half cootch."

"I think I get you," I informed him.

"We got there while she was dancing," he told me. "I don't go for that sort of thing myself, but this creature held the eye, I'll say that for her. We sat there until the lights went up. We were at a floorside table—Larkin knows how to wangle such items—and I found myself looking at a man sitting alone at a table across the floor.

"I could have sworn it was Gerry Marcel. I did a double take, then started to get up and go over and speak to him. I decided I didn't want to. I'd stayed clear of the mess all these years, and there was no sense getting involved again.

"Then I saw him looking at me. A moment later, he got up and left his table. And a little after that Giselle, wearing civvies, came out from backstage to join him. She seemed pretty upset when he didn't come back. So I asked the headwaiter to have her over for a drink. Anne nearly fell off her chair.

"To make a long story short, when she got to our table, I asked her how Gerry was. When she finally figured out I meant her vanished date she said, 'Marcel? But his name is Raymond—Mark Raymond.' I haven't thought about it until just now. Raymond—Raimonda . . . Mark—Marcellus. . . I wonder."

I didn't. I had more than a hunch. I *knew!*

V

I ATE lunch alone at a modest little restaurant in the East Fifties and mulled over what Donald Parton had told me. I didn't know how it happened, or why. But in my bones I was sure that Parton and Dr. Coleman were responsible for bringing invaders from outer space to Earth. No matter how many times I tried to tell myself I was falling for a lot of lunacy, I kept thinking of Gerry Marcel as a man hauled out of his own time by some two thousand years.

I tried to convince myself that Parton had been lying—but I couldn't make myself believe it. I tried to sell myself on the idea that he had fallen victim to some strange hoax or delusion—but Parton was much too hep a character, and far too sane, for that theory to hold water long. And there were the Saucers and the strange type of Latin used in the mysterious negotiations with Washington.

I dabbed at my chicken Tetrazzini, sipped at my iced tea and called for the check, skipping dessert. Then I went downtown on the subway to the F.B.I. office. People in the subway looked thoughtful and frightened. One old lady in a handkerchief shawl kept muttering to herself and crossing herself at intervals.

Even in the office there was tension. There was also an order for me to call Ford Whalen pronto in Washington. When I got through to him, Ford was jumping like the proverbial cat on a hot stove. He said, "When I sent you up there I didn't expect you to disappear. Are you sober? What's going on?"

"That alka seltzer will get the best of you yet," I told him, feeling sore. "Yes, I'm sober. I just got through talking to Donald Parton, and I've got a couple of leads to follow."

"What about Marcel?" Ford snapped. "Everybody down here's going crazy. You never saw such a madhouse."

"Did you have Saucers this morning too?" I asked him.

"We had 'em," he replied. "What about Marcel?"

"Parton claims he saw him in a night club about ten weeks ago—right here in New York," I told him. "I may have picked up a clue from that Gannett babe last night too. I'll let you know as soon as I find out anything definite."

He grunted. From him, in the mood he was in, a grunt was as good as a kiss. I hung up and wasn't sore at him any more. Poor Ford was really in the hot seat on this one—though it was beginning to look as if we all were.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I got some of the hired help to work on my two leads—checking on those regular calls Marcia Gannett claimed she'd been getting from Marcel until two months ago, and seeing what we had on Giselle, the dancer at the Club Dakar.

Giselle didn't prove to be difficult. Under her real name, Sarah Coon, she'd had a minor brush with the law the year before. Nothing bad, just a playboy friend from the wild, wild West, who got overloaded and shot the total out of a night club check with an unlicensed forty-four.

Otherwise, the exotic Giselle was an ex-taxi dancer from Cleveland—or maybe a B-girl would be more accurate—who had stuck to her dancing lessons and was having a minor league success in the big city. She lived alone (it said) in a hotel in the Thirties, just off Herald Square. I told the boys to check on Marcia Gannett's Tuesday calls and went on up there for a look-see.

The hotel was one of those old horrors. It had seen its best days when George M. Cohan was writing *Give My Regards to Broadway*—and had been on the skids ever since.

EVERYTHING was waste space—lobbies, halls, corridors, lace-iron elevator shafts—except the rooms. Giselle lived in a cubicle that had barely space for brass bed and golden oak bureau. She eyed me with suspicion before admitting me. Even when I showed her my stuff she said, "How do I know you're not a phony? And if you aren't, what in hell do you want with me?"

I said, "Let me in and you'll find out. No fooling, I'm real."

She muttered something like, "That's what I'm afraid of," but she opened the door wide and I squeezed in. She was wearing a tan Japanese silk wrapper and a cloth guard over what looked like blue-black hair. Her face was smeared with cold cream. Evidently she had been taking a treatment instead of a treat.

She said, "Well?" and her voice was nasal, but not unpleasantly so. Even in obvious disarray there was nothing unpleasant about Giselle—or rather Sarah Coon. She had a grey-eyed breadth of feature that was close to beautiful when she had her paint on. And her figure was that rare combination—opulent and trim at once.

I gave it to her without preliminaries.

"You know a man named Gerry Marcel?"

Her wide grey eyes looked frankly into mine. "No," she said without a change of expression.

"Let's try it this way then," I told her, sitting down on the edge of the bed and offering her a cigarette. She hesitated, then accepted it. I went on with, "Between two and three months ago, one night at the Dakar, there was a misunderstanding. You were stood up."

"That doesn't happen often," she snapped at me, her eyes smoky.

"I'll go along with you on that," I said as soothingly as I could. "You were to join a man at a table after your late show. A man of middle height and sort of ruddy hair and a trace of accent. By the time you got there he had left—alone. A man named Parton had a waiter bring you to his party-table for a drink. He asked you then if you knew Gerry Marcel and you said that the man was named Mark Raymond. Remember now?"

Beneath the shiny cream on her face, her skin got even whiter. She pulled the cigarette from her lips and licked them clear of grease. Then she eyed me covertly and gave a sort of weary shrug.

She said, her voice low, "Yeah, I remember it. I don't want to because I don't like being stood up. Like all entertainers I live on my nerve and a stand-up's no good for anybody that way. This Mark Raymond—you've got him pegged right, mister. He looked about like you said. He came into the club that night and made quite a pitch for me. He had me interested, alright, but then he ran out."

When she stopped talking I said, "And you're in the habit of letting anybody come in and make a pitch at the club?"

She hated me with her grey eyes. She said sullenly, "Not any more—not unless

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maury—he's the flak—or Pete—he's the owner—give me a sign it's somebody important. But ten weeks ago I was nobody, I didn't have a dime and they were paying me off in shoe buttons. Why shouldn't I corner a decent meal when I see it coming my way? Is that against any Federal law, G-man?"

"None that I know of," I told her. "I was just curious."

"Aren't you all?" she retorted unkindly. Her B-girl experience in Cleveland was still rubbing her raw.

I said, "And you never saw this Mark Raymond again?"

"No!" she snapped, "I never saw him before either." Once again she looked me straight in the eye and I knew she was lying. She was just a little too good at it. She said, "Why, what's he done?"

I said, "We've got a lead he's a scout for the people who are sending these Flying Saucers over. We want to talk to him."

"Flying Saucers?" This time her surprise was real. "You must take me for Daisy Mae. The name is Giselle."

I NODDED toward the small box on top of the bureau. "Turn it on," I told her. "A lot of people are worried about a hell of a lot more than your budding career right now, Sarah."

"Giselle!" she said through clenched teeth, storm signals again in her eyes. When she didn't move I got up and turned on the radio. I didn't even have to shift the dial. A news commentator was pounding it out as if he'd been frightened by Floyd Gibbons's ghost.

He said, "... which is what makes this perhaps the most fateful day in the history of the world. We know for a fact what we have been denying for years—that the Saucers are real. More, we know they are ships bearing pilots from far across trackless space, pilots whose purpose in coming to our planet remains an unfathomable mystery...."

She was up now, standing beside me, listening. I could smell the cloying, oily scent of the cold cream, a trace of stale perfume, a fainter yet stronger smell that was purely woman. Her lips were parted and her bosom rose and fell beneath the tan silk robe.

She said, "It's a gag—it's one of those daffy science fiction programs." And then, when a commercial succeeded the speaker, she reached across me and flipped the dial. Another commentator came on—and he was talking about the Saucers. They had appeared, he said, not only over New York City, but over Washington, Chicago, the West Coast cities, Honolulu, Tokyo, Peking, Moscow, Calcutta, Lahore, the major cities of Europe.

I waited while it sank in. Then she said, "Were they really over the city?"

I nodded. "I saw them, Giselle," I said. "Does this change any of your answers about the man you know as Mark Raymond?"

She clamped her full lips tight and shook her head vigorously. "Why should it?" she countered, "I only saw him that one night. Besides, why should he be the goat? He was an ordinary guy—a nice one—until he stood me up."

"I hope you're right," I told her. "Well, if you remember anything else about him, call the F.B.I. Who knows? You might even get some publicity out of it for that career of yours."

It was below the belt—I meant it to be. She began to burn. Her gray eyes blazed and her face flamed beneath the cold cream. She went to the door with her easy, graceful, dancer's stride and flung it wide. "The elevator's around the corner to your left, G-man," she told me. "If I did know anything about him—which I don't—I wouldn't tell *you*."

I shrugged and made myself look weary. "Okay," I said, "if that's the way you want it. But we'll get him—one way or another."

She said nothing, so I went on out and downstairs. When I got to the switchboard and looked around it, the pimply-faced operator with sugar-candy eyes was just putting a plug into Giselle's number. She looked up at me inquiringly and I flashed my buzzer again. She rolled her eyes, but didn't get in my way.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was an out of town call—to a place called Cotter's Island, Virginia. Furthermore, it was person to person—to someone named Mr. Jonas O'Keeffe. Mr. O'Keeffe, we learned, was out fishing, but was expected back for dinner. I wrote down the number and headed back for the office. If things checked out. . . .

It took me longer than I expected at the office. Just as I'd feared, my stooges had been commandeered for other work, and no research had been done on the Marcia Gannett calls. I raised hell about it, but no one paid any attention to me, so I wound up trying to dig some facts out of Mr. Bell's company myself.

Marcia Gannett, I discovered, was not as much of a recluse as I had thought. She got a lot of calls. The phone company employee on the other end of the line was methodical to the point of exasperation. She reeled off a list of calls that had nothing to do with the time I was interested in.

I was about to give up in disgust when she finally came up with a Virginia exchange. I stopped her right there and had her dig up the date. By back-tracking on the calendar in front of me I was able to put it on the first Tuesday of the month, just three months before.

It panned out all the way, as I'd felt sure it would. The exchange was Nabors, Virginia, and a call to the operator there established the fact that it handled calls to and from Cotter's Island. I got busy with an atlas. Nabors was a town on the seacoast, a few miles south of the beach resorts below Chesapeake Bay. I could plane to Virginia Beach and drive from there.

I called Ford Whalen. He told me to follow through. He sounded tired, as if things weren't breaking well in other quarters. I said, "I could be wrong, but I'm pretty sure our friend is still alive and kicking—on Cotter's Island. So buck up. We'll surely know tomorrow."

"We don't seem to have much time," he told me. "I can't talk over this connection, but things are popping. Keep me up-to-date."

I hung up and made plane arrangements. Here I hit a snag. I couldn't get anything until five o'clock in the morning. It would get me to Virginia Beach before seven and I couldn't beat that any other way—not even on a pogo stick.

I thought about calling up Marcia Gannett and having a drink with her on the excuse of further questioning. I called her, but she wasn't in and I didn't feel like crawling the Village pubs to dig her out. Besides, even if I did find her, she might fall asleep on me again, I thought, sour-graping myself.

I considered going to a show and then killing the night watching Giselle do her stuff at the Club Dakar. I had an idea Giselle didn't like me, and I was feeling mean enough just then to enjoy making her squirm. Then I remembered that squirming was her business and said to hell with it.

I went back to the hotel and had dinner alone and bought a couple of paperback detective novels and took them up to my room with me. I must have fallen asleep reading. When the phone woke me up the bed lamp was still on and one of the books lay face down on my lap.

It was a lousy morning. The streets were wet with rain and it was humid. I wondered, on the way to the airport, whether any planes would be flying. But when I got there all was well and I dug myself some iced tea and toast and felt a little better. I took my time and boarded ship just before she took off.

I sat down in my seat and strapped myself in and then looked to see who was next to the window beside me. She was eying me with an astonishment that must have matched my own. Her name was Marcia Gannett.

VI

IT WAS a bumpy trip—in more ways than one. Neither Marcia nor I said a word until the *fasten seat-belts—no smoking* lights in the front of the cabin went off. Then I unfastened my strap and pulled out some cigarettes and said "Smoke?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She took one. The plane polkaed through a series of air-pockets over Newark Bay and I had a little trouble getting them lit. I couldn't think of anything else to say.

It was Marcia who broke the ice. She plucked a bit of loose tobacco off her lower lip—she was a wet smoker—and said, "Level with me, Burke. Are you following me?"

"Hardly," I told her. "I seem to be traveling with you. Did you call our friend—or did he call you yesterday?"

"Oh . . ." She sounded vague. "Then you know. . . ."

"I know where he is, and I'm on my way to see him," I said. "Outside of that I don't know a damned thing."

She laughed without mirth. Even that early in the morning, she was a lot better looking sober than she had been drunk two nights before. She was no longer in fuzzy focus. Her red hair was crisp and well groomed around the edges. She had on a green, clinging, print dress, and silly little white hat that rode well forward on her head.

She said, "Gerry called me. He's in some kind of trouble. He wouldn't talk about it over the phone."

I put my right forefinger against her near side and pushed the scar of the dagger-wound she had shown me. I said, "Even after what happened—you simply come a-running when the master calls?"

"I come a-running," she told me. "How'd you find out? Was it those phone calls I was fool enough to tell you about, Burke?"

"Partly," I told her. "We got another lead to Cotter's Island last night. I made a reservation on the first plane—this was it."

She studied me for a moment. Then she said, "What are you going to do to Gerry when you find him—if you find him?"

"We'll find him," I told her. "What happens to him depends on how he behaves—and what my chief decides."

"Who's your chief?" she asked me abruptly.

"The President of the United States," I said. After all, in a way it was true.

She thought that over, then asked, "What are you going to do with me?" She didn't look frightened—just wary and determined.

I shrugged and told her, "Probably nothing—unless you make a nuisance of yourself." Then, because this was getting us nowhere, "Did you see the Saucers yesterday?"

"Yes, the damned things woke me up," she replied. "Or rather the commotion they caused." She shivered, looked at me, added, "Don't tell me Gerry Marcel is mixed up with those little items."

"I won't," I said. I wished some other seat in the plane had been empty. Not that I minded sitting next to Marcia Gannett—maybe I liked it, and maybe that was bothering me. But her questions were bothering me too. I had a ridiculous thought for an instant that maybe Marcia was following *me!* I got rid of that idea in a hurry.

I could sense worry all around us in the cabin. I had a hunch that the plane would have been empty of passengers outside of the two of us if people weren't in a hurry to evacuate the big cities. From a few remarks I half-heard above the roar of the engines, I got the idea that some of the fares expected a Flying Saucer to come spinning at us out of the clouds and burn us down with a death-ray at any moment.

Damn the things, I thought. Why, after all these thousands of years, did they have to put in their appearance during my lifetime? It seemed to me they might have waited a little while longer. I didn't know where they came from or what was in them, but I knew none of us on Earth was going to feel happy again until they had gone for good. As to what might happen in the meantime, I didn't want to think.

BIG LUKE JOHNSON, rumpled, harassed and sarcastic as ever, was waiting at Virginia Beach with a Bureau sedan when we landed. He looked at me, then at Marcia, then back at me

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and said, "Tennis, anyone? Or would you rather have me just pour tea—iced tea?"

I grinned and said, "Stow it, creep! This is Marcia Gannett. She's a sort of hitch-hiker in this case and I figure we might as well take her along. She'll catch up with us anyway."

"It's your funeral," he told me. "Ford says you're in charge." Then, with a sour look at Marcia, "The pleasure is all mine."

"Drive on, Jeeves," I told him, closing the door on Marcia in the back seat and climbing into the front beside Luke. He got the motor running and headed south for Nabors.

He said, his voice low, out of the corner of his mouth, "The situation is what is known as deteriorating rapidly."

"Just what *is* happening?" I asked him, keeping my own voice down. "Up in New York, all I've learned is what I read in the papers."

"Then you ain't heard nothing yet," he said. "Our invaders have delivered an ultimatum. They want every ounce of mined radioactive material in the world—and they want it quick. The story will break this afternoon. It's too hot to hold. The loyal opposition is kicking up a stink in Congress and the British are talking about dying with their boots on and the Russians are screaming capitalist plot."

"People!" I said. "There's nothing like them. When they've got a chance like this to pull together, what do they do?"

"Keep right on grinding tomahawks," Luke replied. "Listen, Ford's been pleased with the way you've been working. You're about the only one he is pleased with."

"That was yesterday," I told him out of long experience.

"Yeah," he replied dismally. Then, "What about this chick in the back seat? How does she figure?"

"Friend of Gerry Marcel," I told him. "So friendly Marcel's wife stuck a knife in her ribs some years back. He sent out an SOS for her—she says—and she wound up sitting next to me on the plane."

"I still think we should have left her back at the Beach with a tail on her," he said doubtfully. "If she kicks up any trouble and louses us up, we're cooked—you are anyway."

"I've been fried, broiled and sautéed in my time," I told him. "I guess I can take another cooking."

"You ain't been braised yet—over a slow fire," he said cheerfully. I told him to shut up and asked him about the set-up we were walking—or rather driving—into.

He scowled, then he said, "I've only been briefed so far. Nabors is just a little fishing village. About fifty years ago, during the peak of the summer hotel era, some moneybags tried to promote it into a resort. He flopped.

"Population today," he went on, "six hundred forty-two people. Local law, one sheriff, two constables. One package store, one elementary and high school combined, two churches, one municipal building. Yeah, Nabors calls itself a city."

"What about Cotter's Island?" I wanted to know.

Luke put a toothpick in his mouth and chewed on it meditatively. "It's not really an island—except at flood tide—according to the chart," he said finally. "It's a three-hundred-acre hunk of highland separated from the mainland the rest of the time by a quarter mile of salt marshes. There's a causeway of sorts."

"Sounds nice and isolated," I told him.

"Well, it ain't exactly crowded," he suggested. "But it is privately owned. And the people hereabouts are touchy as to local rights. A rich couple named O'Keeffe owns the works—which means they got the Nabors law in their pockets too. They don't mix much with the townsfolk. Mrs. O'Keeffe's too uppity, it seems. Mr. O'Keeffe is okay, but the missus keeps a tight rein on him. Maybe it's just as well—he came close to getting in a jam a couple of years ago with one of the minister's daughters."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That sounds like our boy," I told him.

"O'Keeffe?" Luke asked. At my nod he added, "Well, that's one I hadn't figured."

Marcia leaned forward and asked for a cigarette just then. I handed one back to her, lit, and we drove the rest of the way in silence.

Luke had told me Nabors was an abandoned summer resort posing as a fishing village, but the full impact didn't hit me until we had driven about a mile past a drunken-looking sign that read:

You Are Now Entering Nabors—the Juin les-Pins of America.

Whatever that meant.

The road had edged over toward an ocean-eroded shoreline, and I found myself looking at a sort of elephant's graveyard of haunted houses. There must have been fifty or sixty of them stretched out along a couple of miles—tottering summer mansions with weedy lawns separating them from the road.

We passed porches and gables and mansard roofs and domes and turrets and cupolas. Whoever designed these rotting brick and wood and stucco castles must have had a mind to match his rich clients' diseased livers. It was gruesome. In a few years they would all tumble into the ocean and no one would even remember they had ever been built.

WE CROSSED a rumbling wooden trestle-bridge over an inlet that stank of dead fish and found ourselves in Nabors proper. The morning sun was doing its best by then, but it found nothing to mirror its brightness in that weather-beaten little community. As he tooled us slowly along the tar-patched main street, Luke said, "Well, Avon, where do we go now?"

"We find us a headquarters," I told him. "Then you sit there by the phone and keep tabs on Marcia, while I scout around."

He was just beginning to grumble, like a good F.B.I. man should, when we rolled over the top of a little hill and the town fell away. Our headquarters loomed up in front of us. Loomed up is right. In size and style that monster hotel looked like one of the huge old barns that flourished seventy years ago in Saratoga.

It had more wings than a helicopter—all of them five or six stories high. It was a dingy white, and sprawled all over the waterfront like an outsize albino octopus. Luke finally pulled to a stop under a porte-cochere that looked ready to fall apart in the first stiff breeze.

Nobody came out to greet us, so we went on inside. We found ourselves in a lobby that looked like late twilight. It must have been sixty feet in all directions, including up. The roof was a huge dome of stained glass, and the sun streamed through one place where it had been broken—probably by a hungry seagull trying to crack a clam. Fragments of rusty palm trees stood in big pots against a colonnade of thin iron pillars, supporting a balcony two flights up.

"Well, I must say *this* is cheerful," said Marcia, shivering. "Are you boys going to lock me up here or what?"

"Why, no," I told her. "As soon as we can get settled here, Luke's going to buy you breakfast."

"How Charles Addams can you get?" she retorted. "Grapefruit with confectioner's arsenic, eggs shirred in bichloride of mercury, and café au cyanide, I suppose.

"We have us a character," said Luke, regarding Marcia for the first time with something like respect. Luke has a sense of humor that has been described as weird.

Our host appeared then, from somewhere. He was a surly character in sleeve garters and a yellowish walrus mustache, who shuffled across the vast lobby, peering at us over his bifocals. He said in an unexpectedly soft and pleasant Southern voice, "Anything I can do for you good people?"

We settled for a two-bedroom suite and learned to our surprise that there *was* a dining room in operation. "Nothin' very fancy, I'm afraid—but we got

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

us the best cook south of the Beach."

I spotted the telephone—an old-fashioned stand-up affair—and told Luke and Marcia to go on down and order breakfast while I phoned Washington.

I called Ford and told him we were in Nabors and set. He liked that, but he wasn't too happy about Marcia being with us. "Damn it, Avon," he said, "you must have opened up a trail a mole could follow."

"I had to do it to smoke out our friend," I told him. "Her turning up on the plane was just bad luck. And maybe we can use her to get a little action if we get stopped."

"You'd better not get stopped!" he warned me. "You have Luke sit on her, hear? If you turn up anything, I may be down myself."

"That hot?" I asked him.

"Hotter," he replied. He didn't explain, and I knew he couldn't talk over the phone, so I put the receiver back on its hook and raided Luke's suitcase for a clean shirt. The big ox is a couple of sizes larger around the neck than I am, but at least it wasn't tight and wasn't dirty like mine. I walked down stairs that looked like they belonged in the Czar's palace.

I never did get to the dining room. As I got down to that immense lobby, Luke came busting in the door, looking like a lobster with hives. He raced for the desk and almost got there before I stopped him and asked him what gave.

"It's that damn chick!" he exploded. "She said she had to powder her nose, and when I went to see what was keeping her so long I found she'd walked off with our car!

"And that ain't all," Luke told me. "When we sat down she started fussing with the flowers on the table—turning them toward the wall—and knocked her handbag off. I made a grab to pick it up, but she beat me to it. But not before I saw a couple of things in it."

"What were they?" I asked, feeling sick.

"Money!" he told me. "Enough green stuff in there to choke a giraffe. And that's not all. She was carrying some kind of a fancy shiv. All covered with jewels and things."

"Oh, great!" I said. "I suppose you left the keys in the car?"

He looked sheepish, not mad. He said, scuffing his shoes, "I didn't think we were going to stay here when we came in. Hell, I didn't even know the crummy place was open."

"Okay," I said. "The F.B.I. in action—grim, relentless, efficient. . . ." I didn't have the heart to say any more.

"What do we do now?" he asked me. "Walk?"

"We try to get a car and go after her," I told him.

He was still protesting when another soft voice said, "I couldn't help overhearing, sirs. If I can be of any service . . ."

VII

THE speaker was of middle height. He was wearing *huaraches,* unpressed khaki duck pants, a red-and-white striped short-sleeved Basque shirt and a dirty yachting cap with no club emblem. He was chunkily built, but the muscles of his bronzed forearms were like cords of rope as he lifted a half-smoked cigarette to his mouth. He looked like a half dozen other citizens of Nabors we had seen on the dirt sidewalks while passing through the town.

I opened my mouth to speak, but Luke was ahead of me. He said, "If you can take us to Cotter's Island, let's go."

He looked at us for a moment and though his lips didn't move I got the impression he was smiling. Then he shrugged and said, "Why not?" He turned and led us out of the hotel.

His car was one of those postwar crossbreeds between a pickup truck and a station wagon called a suburban. We piled in and I said, "You're doing us a hell of a favor. We'll be glad to pay for it."

"Think nothing of it," he drawled in rich Virginia accents. He didn't have to be told we were in a hurry. He put his

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

foot down firmly on the accelerator and rode that suburban like a cowboy on a bronc.

"The O'Keeffes aren't too fond of visitors," he told us as we wound between twin borders of scrubby pines. "You friends of theirs?"

"They'll see *us*," I told him. I didn't want to have our business broadcast all over Nabors. We spun around a curve on one-and-a-half wheels and then our chauffeur brought his car to a sudden shuddering halt. Just ahead, on the right, was our sedan with its nose in the ditch.

When we got out to investigate we saw that the right front tire was blown and the left front door open. It was easy to figure what had happened. Marcia had driven over something sharp—the jagged tear in the shoe showed that—and the combination of high speed, the high-crowned road and the resulting blowout had done the rest. When she realized her predicament the girl had skipped into the woods.

"Whose car?" our chauffeur inquired casually. "I've never seen it around here before."

"Ours," I told him. I was trying to figure out a revised plan of action. I turned to Luke and said, "It's a good thing you were an Eagle Scout and put in a couple of years as a forest ranger."

"For God's sake!" Luke looked at me as if he thought I was off my squash. "You know as well as I do I never—"

"If you weren't," I interrupted, "you'd better get busy. It's up to you to find Marcia before she puts that jeweled dagger to use. We don't know her exact reason in coming here."

"But you brought her here yourself," said Luke.

There was no denying that. I wet my lips and said, "After her, big boy. I'm going on to the island."

He looked at me mournfully, then accusingly. "You're wearing my shirt," he informed me as if it was news to me.

When we got back in the suburban, Luke had already vanished into the scrub pines on what he hoped was Marcia's trail. My chauffeur looked at me thoughtfully as he got the car back in gear. He said, "Are you fellows some kind of law? You don't look like mobsters."

"We're law," I told him and let it go at that. He didn't say another word until we emerged from the woods onto a long wooden bridge that spanned another stretch of salt marshes.

"There's Cotter's Island," he said, nodding at the windshield.

IT WAS an uneven expanse of land, stretching for more than half a mile from the other end of the white bridge. It was an area of low cliffs, topped by dark pine woods and occasional glimpses of meadow. Smoke curled from a sort of sentry box, also painted white, on the island end of the bridge. My chauffeur slowed when he reached it, and waved to a Negro who sat within it, tilted back in a chair and smoking a corn-cob pipe. The Negro waved lazily.

"You know this place well?" I asked him.

He glanced at me quickly, then drawled, "I ought to. I work around here once in awhile."

"What are they like—the O'Keeffes?" I asked him.

I should have known better. He gave me a quick sidelong glance as we crested a small rise in the shell driveway and said, "You'll find out right quick now, mister." Again I got the idea he was laughing at me within himself.

We passed an expanse of lawn on which fat sheep grazed contentedly. Then, around a turn, we seemed almost to run into a low mansion of white stone beyond which lay more lawn, some shrubbery, a glittering beach and an ultramarine sea.

My chauffeur stopped the car. As I got out he said, "I'll be around. Whenever you want me just ask for Joe. Good luck, mister."

"Thanks," I told him. "Thanks a lot—Joe." He grinned at me and waved good-naturedly as he drove off slowly.

A handsome mulatto girl in a starched

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

white uniform opened the door and eyed me disinterestedly. I said, "Mr. or Mrs. O'Keeffe, please." When she hesitated I got out my credentials. She looked at them intently, but seemingly without comprehension. So I said, "Tell them I'm here, will you?"

"But Mr. O'Keeffe. . . ." she began, then thought better of it. She said, "I'll see, sir."

I looked at the outside of the house. It was built of some stuff I didn't recognize—great white oblong chunks. It looked soft, but it wasn't soft to the touch. It also looked expensive—and I didn't think this was a deception. The girl came back and murmured, "Mrs. O'Keeffe will see you, sir."

I followed her over broad unstained teakwood floors, across a simply furnished hall and into a sun porch, whose long wall of windows looked out over lawn, beach and ocean. Indicating a modernistic armchair with a nubbly chrome-yellow cover, the mulatto girl said, "If you'll sit down, sir, Mrs. O'Keefe will be right in."

She came in soon after. I don't know just what I had been expecting, but it wasn't this rather small, hardy, suntanned woman. She had a cigarette stuck in one corner of her lipsticked mouth. She had on russet shorts and a russet halter with golden polka dots. Her figure was good, but not sensational, and she moved well. Her hair was dark gold, with lighter sunstreaks in it, and her tilted eyes were light brown with golden flecks. She could have been seventeen—or forty.

She lifted a barely curved eyebrow and said, "Yes?"

Her assurance was absolute. I felt my own purpose crumbling and had to remind myself sternly of the importance of my assignment. I said, "Mrs. O'Keefe, I'm from the F.B.I. I want to talk to your husband."

SHE studied me, then walked to the window where she turned abruptly to face me again. She said quietly, "I was promised we would not be disturbed as long as Jonas remained on Cotter's Island. I know he did get away about three months ago, but I got him back before there was trouble—and surely the old charges are not going to be brought up again now."

I shook my head. "No," I told her, "it's not the old charges. We simply want to talk to him."

She followed my gaze to the television set built into one of the end walls, and I saw sudden little radiating crinkles at the corners of her eyes. She said, "Oh!" and sat down on a light blue sofa. With her vivid coloring she was suddenly and radiantly lovely. She didn't look at all dangerous.

"Yes," I told her, "it's those damned Saucers. We need all the information we can get, and we have reason to think your husband can supply it."

"Whatever makes you think that?" She was as chill and wary as a mother tiger guarding her cub. The cute little trick was a cool, alert, imperious woman whom I could very well imagine slipping a jeweled dirk into Marcia's ribs. The dark-blonde babe look had vanished, and there was something very old, something almost alien about her.

I told her about the language the Saucer people had used—that it matched the Latin Dr. Coleman had used in his pamphlet. She lit a fresh cigarette and looked thoughtful. Then she said, "Poor, dear Phil—he was a great man." Apparently she had decided to drop all pretense. She looked me in the eye and said, "A lot of people thought he killed himself because of me. He didn't. It was because of the Saucers. I thought he was crazy at the time."

I accepted that because I'd already decided it was probably true—all but about his being crazy. I said, "We've got to have Gerry Marcel. We need all the help we can get. And we can get it in an emergency like this, whether you're willing or not."

She looked at me as if my sincerity was a bit crude. Then she sighed and said quietly, "What makes you think my husband can help you, Mr. Burke?" I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had shown her my buzzer after she first entered—"Just because of a coincidence?"

"Coincidence?" I countered. "You know better than that, Mrs. Marcel."

"O'Keeffe," she corrected, barely moving her lips.

"All right, Mrs. O'Keeffe. Surely you must be aware of the fact that the world faces a crisis unprecedented in history."

"A crisis for which my husband was in no way responsible," she informed me. "Mr. Burke, we were literally exiled to this island—under conditions we promised to obey until we—or until Mr. O'Keeffe dies. I intend to hold to my word and these conditions. I intend to see that my husband holds to them. We have both known much trouble and, inadvertently, caused trouble for others. Now, will you please go? If I felt Jonas could be of help—" She broke off, shrugged, turned toward the door.

Her poise was unshakable. Here was a woman realist, determined to hold her world within limits that suited her. I wished I could do something to shake her out of it. Perhaps, I thought, I might get some action if I could frighten her. But she was not scared of the F.B.I. She was not scared of the threat of the Saucers. The F.B.I. she had once bested in a battle of influence. And the Saucers had not as yet bothered her—or her world. She was unshaken.

Then I remembered my torn pants. Until I managed to get the rip mended, they had knocked my poise on its ear. I looked at Mrs. Coleman-Marcel-O'Keeffe's linen shorts, but the russet cloth was flawlessly perfect.

UNLESS I thought of something in about one second, I was going to have to call for help. And then I realised the rip in Raimonda's poise was right at hand, had been there all along. I said quietly, "On the way here just now we lost track of a woman named Marcia Gannett. She's working her way through the woods toward this island, I think. In her bag are a wad of thousand dollar bills and a long jeweled poniard. Your husband sent for her last night!"

That did it—the fate of the world couldn't touch her, but the idea of Marcia with a knife could. Or so I thought as she pivoted to face me once more. She said, "My husb— Marcia Gannett? With lots of money?"

"That's right," I told her. I saw then I'd been wrong. She wasn't even thinking of the knife. What was bothering her was the fact that Gerry had sent for Marcia—and that Marcia was loaded. I began to get a new light on the Cotter's Island setup—and I no longer wondered why. Mr. Marcel-O'Keeffe had tried to break away. He was little more than a prisoner in custody of his wife.

"*You've got to find her—quickly!*" she snapped. I wondered where the little beach girl who had first wandered out onto the sun porch to greet me had got to. "She must be stopped."

"Okay," I said, "I'll make a deal. I'll help you handle Marcia if you'll help me get your husband to Washington."

I seemed to have stopped her again. Her mouth fell open, then snapped shut. She said, and her voice was no longer straight American, but held an underlying accent I figured was Italian, "*Washington!* But that's near where the Saucer landed. You're not going to let Gerry fall into their hands again!"

I said as calmly as I could, "We're not going to let Mr. O'Keeffe fall into anybody's hands, ma'am. We want his help."

"Well, you're not going to get it—not from me," she informed me defiantly. "I'll take care of Marcia Gannett myself."

"Careful," I warned her. "You did that once before."

"And I'll do it again if I have to!" she threatened. My rip in the pants of Raimonda's pride had got a lot more violent than I'd figured it would. The tigress was really aroused. She looked at me and said, "*Go!*" She actually growled the word at me.

MOMENTS later I was back on the outside, looking out. Where, I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wondered, was Joe? I didn't want to stand there, bellowing like Chloe into the swampland, so I set out to walk it back to the mainland.

I came to a fork in the driveway I hadn't noticed. I hesitated, then took the left-hand turn and trudged up a low hill. All around me was a pretty pastoral landscape—but I was in no mood to enjoy it. If I'd been after a reaction from Raimonda—well, I'd got more than I'd planned on.

I reached the top of the hill—and stopped. I was about to swing back and retrace my steps when I saw something else. There was a curve in the road, just before it reached the low cliff that separated it from the salt marshes. A clump of low pines hid from sight what lay around the curve. But sticking out from the trees was the rear end of a suburban.

I was breathing hard when I got to the bottom. Around the turn, at the end of the road, beyond the suburban, a weathered pier ran out over the salt marshes. I don't know what it was used for—maybe boats at high tide when the ocean was rough, or for a clamming.

At the end of the pier sat a man in a Basque shirt and a yachting cap, smoking a pipe, his eyes fixed on the woodlands across the flats. I yelled at him from the base of the pier and he got up slowly and walked toward me—with what looked to me like a trace of reluctance. Then he said, "Ready to go back?"

"Yeah," I told him. "Let's go."

He looked at me doubtfully, then took off his hat and stroked back his hair. It was a ruddy brown, near red, and all at once I knew. I said, "You're Gerry Marcel."

He grinned.

"That's one of the names I've used."

VIII

WE WALKED side by side over the soft chalky boards of the pier and sat down at its end. Across the tidal flat the thick growth of the shore was unbroken by any sign of life except birds. I was a lot more interested in the fact that I was sitting next to Gerry Marcel than I was in the outcome of the chase through the woods just then.

My quarry broke the silence after a while. He said, and his Nabors City accent had disappeared and was replaced by one that might have been Italian, but just missed somehow, "Who are you?"

I told him. Then I said, "You've given us a hell of a hunt."

He shrugged his thick shoulders. "Don't blame me," he said. Then he turned his attention back to the shoreline.

It wasn't my job to pump him. My job was to get him to Washington and let the experts do that. But, studying him, I felt doubtful that they'd be able to dig much out of him against his will. I began to understand a little of what Marcia and Giselle must have sensed in him, but not being a woman of course, I couldn't get it all.

Physically he was a lot more than rugged. Half-lounging there beside me with one foot dangling, the other drawn up with an arm resting across the knee, he was as graceful as a cat—and as lithe and alert. Thinking back over the last hour I could not recall his having made an awkward move.

But what he had was a lot more than physical. There was a strangeness to him that was like an aura. In his knockabout loafing clothes he looked like a man dressed for a costume party. Hell, maybe I'm not explaining it very well, but that's how it felt to me.

My curiosity was getting more catlike than my companion by the second. For a guy who was practically under G-man arrest he seemed oddly unconcerned as to his fate.

I said, after lighting a smoke, "Never learned to like them, did you, Germanicus?"

That seemed to wake him up. He started very slightly and slowly brought his eyes to rest on mine. I couldn't tell you what color they were, but they scared me. From their expression he might have been weighing whether to cut my throat or merely stifle me in the mud flat beneath the pier.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He said, "How much do you know about me, Burke?"

I told him, "Among others I talked to Donald Parton yesterday."

"Parton?" He frowned slightly, then his expression cleared. "Oh yes—I remember. He used to be Dr. Coleman's assistant. What does he know?"

"Not a great deal," I replied, "but he has guessed a lot. Remember, he's the only man alive who knows about that experiment of Doc Coleman's. Tell me—before you were picked up, did you really soldier on the Rhine? I was there myself in nineteen forty-five."

He laughed—abruptly and without mirth. He said, "I went back there before my exile here. Parts of it looked almost the same. I went also to Italy and Africa—I wouldn't have recognized them." He lapsed again into silence and resumed his watch of the opposite shore.

I asked, "What were you—in your own world, I mean?"

He said, "I was a *praetor*—a sort of Class Two provincial governor. I was called home from what you call Germany to be made *propraetor* of Galatia—you might call it a promotion. I was on my way to Rome from Anzio when it—when whatever it was happened."

"What was it like?" I asked him. After all, as far as I or any one else knew, he was the only human being ever to be plucked out of his own time and place and drawn willy nilly into the future—his future, of course.

HE THOUGHT it over and finally he said, "It was extremely unpleasant. The worst part of it was that I didn't lose consciousness. It was like being dragged from my horse by a hand I could not see. Naturally I thought some god had seized me."

He paused, and for a moment I thought I was going to have to keep prodding him. Apparently he had been able to talk to so few people about his appalling experience that he was bursting at the seams with it. He *wanted* to get it off his chest.

He said, "I couldn't see anything much—I couldn't even breathe. In view of what I've learned since I got here, I'm damned if I know why I didn't simply burst once I was clear of Earth. But either the machine Dr. Coleman used protected me, or it happened too fast. I had no idea whether it lasted aeons or seconds."

He seemed to be trying to collect his thoughts, then went on with, "Naturally I thought myself dead. I consigned myself to oblivion—I have seen too much of death to believe in the mockery of a hereafter." He paused again, then added, "But just before I died it stopped—and I found myself somewhere else."

"Where?" I asked him, feeling the gnawings of disbelief.

He shrugged and replied, "I don't know—but wherever it was, it wasn't on this world. Oh, it was a world, all right, a world with high purple mountains and yellow seas and a thin red sun that filled half the heavens. And at night the star-patterns in the skies were strange."

"Were you there long?" I asked him, recalling the breakdown of the Coleman-Parton experiment in mid-course.

"I don't know," he told me. "It seemed long enough—too long. You see, I was a prisoner on that strange world, an animal in a cage."

"What were your captors like?" I asked him.

"I don't know," he repeated, frowning. "I've tried to determine what they were ever since. I didn't see them at all until I had been a captive for six sunrises. Then they looked like me."

"What!" I exclaimed, appalled.

He nodded. "I may have been bewitched—hypnotized, I believe you call it. Or perhaps they were able to assume whatever shape they wished. They were clever—fiendishly clever. They were able to address me in my own language."

"What makes you think they weren't human?" I inquired.

He laughed again—that short mirthless laugh. Then he said, "They weren't men, whatever they may have been, however they spoke, however they ap-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

peared. I found that out."

"What were they like otherwise?" I asked him.

He shrugged, said, "Like jailors. Oh, they treated me well enough. They fed me stuff that kept me alive, but which I hated. Then they asked me what I wanted."

"I thought by then that I would have to spend my life with them, so I asked for grain and grapes and livestock. This puzzled them too—I got a definite idea that all of their foodstuffs are manufactured—it tasted that way.

"They couldn't produce livestock, but they flew me around their planet in one of their ships until I found stuffs very like corn and grapes and something like the coconut from Asia. These they brought together in one place for me. Then they enclosed me there."

"What sort of enclosure?" I asked when Gerry paused again.

"I couldn't see it, but it was there," he told me. "I all but broke the blade of my sword trying to shatter it. It covered my little enclosure like half a bubble. Within it my crops grew with astonishing speed."

I had another thought and interrupted with, "What sort of flying vehicles did they use?"

He looked at me as if I was a fool to ask the question. Then he said, "I think perhaps you know the answer to that."

"I think maybe I do," I told him. "Flying Saucers?"

He nodded, then said, "Since there was neither companionship nor women, I needed wine. Had there been time, I'd have brewed the barbarian whisky of the Goths from the grain they gave me.

"Maybe what I grew wasn't the finest Falernian—or champagne. But it was the best anyone could do under the circumstances. And all the while my captors, looking like me until they opened their mouths, were watching me, asking me questions.

"They seemed very anxious to know how I had come to their planet. In my bewildered condition I could make little sense out of their questions. They seemed to realize this and didn't torture me. But since being brought here I have studied and thought—Dr. Coleman was of great assistance to me."

AN EXPRESSION I can only call "fond" spread over his rather tough countenance. Evidently, like everyone else I'd met who had known Doc Coleman, Gerry Marcel was devoted to his sponsor. Yet, I thought, he had not hesitated to rob him of his wife.

He looked at me keenly for a moment, then laughed again and said, "You're wondering about Raimonda and me. I don't think I can explain it to you—but the feeling of your people for women and the feeling we had are two difference things.

"With us, as with you, women were free. However, their freedom lay not so much in business and careers as with you. It went further. When a man's wife wanted another man and he wanted her, they took each other. If their mates objected or the lovers wanted marriage, divorces were arranged. No one expected fidelity."

"Sounds pretty primitive," I replied, still puzzled.

"On the contrary," Marcel told me, "it was highly civilized—too civilized, from what your history books have told me. But consider, Burke, is there anything more primitive and crude than one person feeling that he or she actually possesses another, legally or otherwise? That a man can demand fidelity from a woman or vice versa?"

"When you put it that way—no," I told him. "Still, I should think it would have made for a pretty uncertain home life."

"Home life!" The words were loaded with contempt. "Your idea of home life is hardly life at all—it is a form of death."

"That depends again on the point of view," I said. I decided to steer the conversation back to the main channel. "What did you learn about your captors' questions while you were on their planet?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He took only a second to rechart his thoughts, replied. "I derived a definite impression that I was on one of many planets inhabited by them. They kept talking of other worlds as if they were other cities. Around these planets they have some sort of protective web or wall —probably like the one that bounded my prison.

Apparently I had pierced this wall and been picked up by some sort of beam they had. Luckily the atmosphere on Centaurus was breathable, or I'd soon have been dead. My captors, whatever they were, use air much like our own."

"Tell me," I asked, "how they managed to resemble you."

"Resemble me!" Again he laughed. "They mirrored me. I'm not sure that isn't what frightened me most about them. It is given to very few men to know how they look to others. The experience is disillusioning. I think my captors have the ability to assume any appearance they wish. I can explain it in no other way. I was the only man they had seen."

"So they modeled themselves on you?" I asked.

He nodded, then said, "That is why, when I killed one of them, it was unpleasantly like killing myself."

"You killed a Centaurean?" I was astounded.

Again he nodded, told me, "That was what caused the trouble. Apparently, amongst themselves, life is sacred—at least the life of members of their own species." He paused and once more his shoulders shook and this time it was an unmistakable shudder.

"That's how I found out what they really were—ugh!" His face twisted in distaste. "I didn't mean any special harm as it happened. I was too numb, too overwhelmed, too lost, to have any plans for escape. Where could I escape to? The most I could hope for was survival."

"My prison was by the shore of a broad yellow lake. An inlet extended into my cell," he continued. "Once I tried to swim out under water to see if my enclosure extended beneath it. It did. They weren't annoyed by my effort. They seemed to think it comical.

"So I tended my crops and made wine. Finally I was able to eat mostly my own meal-cakes—they allowed me fire—and then to drink my own wine. My captors seemed especially interested in the wine. They gathered around me—a good dozen of them—while I brought out one of the containers they'd given me and opened it. Apparently they had no thought of eating or drinking beyond mere nourishment.

"I lifted the container and tasted the stuff, then took a swig," Gerry Marcel went on. "It was raw and their native grapes had a flavor unlike the grapes of Earth—they tasted almost mealy. But it had body and flavor of a sort. After eating their food and drinking only water all this while, I imagine anything alcoholic would have tasted like nectar. At any rate, I got roaring drunk.

"They sat around and watched me and listened to me and discussed me in terms I could not understand. My intoxication seemed to fascinate them. Finally one of them asked me if I was happy. I told him I'd never felt better in my life.

"This same imitation me, asked me if the effects were harmful. I told him they weren't, of course—just then I was blessing Bacchus and all his works. He asked if he could have some and I handed him the container and told him to help himself."

Gerry Marcel rubbed his chin reminiscently and said, "He lifted the container to his lips and drank—and began to dissolve. It was the most terrible thing I've ever witnessed. He didn't make a sound, mind you, all the time he was dying. Nor did the others—they stood around and watched, not offering to help . . . stunned apparently."

"What do you mean—'he dissolved'?" I asked him.

MARCEL thought, then said slowly, "It was as if his whole outer casing seemed to melt. It didn't run down like

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the wax of a candle—it just sort of folded in on itself again and again until it wasn't any more. What was left—well, it looked like a giant slug. And then even this dissolved on the ground like a jellyfish in the sunlight."

He tugged at his cap again, then added, "I was as stupefied as the rest of them. And then my audience rustled like trees in a wind—rustle is the closest I can come to putting it into English. The next thing I knew they were uttering shrill keening noises and closing in on me. Drunk or not, I knew they intended to kill me."

"What'd you do?" I asked, fascinated. This man might be a prodigious liar—but somehow I couldn't think so. To lie as he was lying—if he was—he'd have had to be a better actor than any of the Barrymores.

He said, "I threw the container at the nearest of them and ran for my sword and helmet and shield—I'd lost my breastplate on the trip to their planet somehow. Some of the wine spilled over him and he started to dissolve. I didn't stick around to analyze it.

"By the time I had recovered my weapons they were upon me. I slashed at one of them with my sword and cut through him like cheese—apparently they had no bones under their surface. I gave another the point of my shield and crumpled him like a bad pumpkin.

"But the other eight kept after me. One of them seemed to slither around my ankle like a snail, catching my feet as if they were mired in quicksand. I recall glancing down and seeing parts of my image broken and distorted by the move. That was the worst of all."

He stopped and I asked impatiently, "What happened then?"

"I don't know," he told me. "I was snatched from them and once again almost suffocated. I had a sense of vast incredible swift movement—and then was lying locked in Dr. Coleman's strange machine." He eyed me without seeming to see me at all, added, "When I was released I found myself in the here—and now."

IX

I LIT a fresh cigarette and thought it over. I could make nothing of Gerry Marcel's story. So I said, "What happened then?"

"If you've investigated me and talked to Parton you must have a fair idea," he said. Then, after a pause, "Have you stopped to consider the problems I have had to face since being brought here?"

"A little," I told him. "Language, customs and all. . . ."

"Language!" he snorted. "When I was nineteen I had learned the tongues of six nations of Gaul and Germany and four of the dialects of Africa. Customs—they are not hard to conform to. No, the difference, the difficulty lay in habits of thought and feeling. I have never been able to master those!"

"I'm not sure I get you," I told him.

He turned one hand palm up, said, "Consider the matter of human life. In my own age we were taught to expect death. When the occasion demanded, it was not considered a crime to kill a man. But in this strange time to which I have been brought. . . ." He shook his head.

"Surely murder wasn't smiled at in Rome," I said.

"Not always," he replied. "It could be justifiable. But here—especially in the United States. . . ." He shook his head. "You punish people who eliminate the most worthless and criminal beings. Yet you slaughter women and children by the hundreds of thousands—even by millions—in time of war."

"Don't try to tell me the Romans didn't," I protested.

"Not on the scale you practice it," he retorted. "And we usually tried to save all we could to produce our wealth. Then, your automobile accidents. You make a fetish of human life, yet you permit forty thousand a year to perish because of poor roads and tax licensing laws. I find it hard to understand."

That stopped me, of course. All I could come up with was, "I suppose your age also had its share of paradoxes."

He did not reply. Instead he went

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back to his own story, "Most people seem to think Dr. Coleman killed himself because of Raimonda and me. That is not so."

"I know that," I told him, "and so do some others. We believe his suicide was caused by guilt at having brought the Saucers."

"He discussed that with me before his death," Marcel informed me, nudging at the pier with one of his rubber-soled shoes. "He felt that through a complicated combination of circumstances the beam from his laboratory that brought me out of my own time left a trail for the Centaureans to follow. He was deeply despondent about it."

He sighed, added, "So he destroyed himself. He'd have done better to remain and attempt to defend his world against what he brought it. He understood Raimonda and me. He knew she was the one person I could turn to at first, just as I answered an ancestral call in her own nature. Her family existed in the days of the Tarquins."

I almost asked him what Tarquins were, then remembered hazily that they were Etruscan kings the early Romans drove out. Gerry Marcel said, "He divided his fortune between Raimonda and myself at his death—but placed her in control of it as permanent trustee.

"I had learned something of your world and felt a return of my normal desires for freedom and power. With the millions Raimonda placed at my disposal and my lack of—inhibitions and moral restrictions, I was able to double my fortune within a very few years.

"I thought the world was mine—yet I was constantly being smothered in contradictions. Those I sought to befriend I destroyed—and those I sought to destroy benefited from my actions."

Puzzled, I said, "I don't understand."

"The woman I favored above others was nearly destroyed by my wife," he informed me. "I managed to assign a considerable sum to her before my exile here, but she has had a sorry time because of me."

"Why didn't you leave her alone then?" I asked. "Why did you send for her to come here?"

"Because I need money," he said almost casually, as if that excuse were sufficient for anything. "I must get out of here before the Centaureans find me. Raimonda will never let me go. I tried to escape three months ago — but a friend of Raimonda's, a Lucy Larkin, saw me in a cabaret and got word to her. It was come back here or go to prison. I had enough of prison on the halfway planet."

"After all," I said, "you did kill Marcus Offord."

"The fat dog tried to blackmail me," Gerry Marcel said angrily. "So I killed him."

"Just like that?"

JUST like that," he said. His lips curled in a faintly derisive smile. "The blubbery devil thought I had come to agree to his terms. I took him out in my car and throttled him slowly. His eyes actually popped out of his head and dangled by their threads before he died. I threw him out of the car and left him by the road."

"You left a trail a baby could have followed," I told him, repressing an upheaval beneath my diaphragm.

He turned to me then and said, "Now, what do you want with me?"

"I don't want you," I informed him. "My boss in Washington does. It has something to do with the Saucer landing." I didn't see how I could do any harm by telling him something he must already have guessed. His lips thinned to a line as he studied me.

"If I go with you it will mean my death. The Centaureans have followed me here to avenge my slaying of their comrades," he said.

"There is also," I informed him, "a little matter of demands for radioactive matter from this planet."

"Window dressing!" he exclaimed. "They can mine any planet in the galaxy. Oh, they'll take it if I know them. But they want me."

"Don't worry," I said. "The govern-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment will protect you. All they want from you is information."

"How do you know what they want, Burke?" he countered. "How do you know what they'll do? I am not afraid to die, but I dislike being handed over as a sacrifice to my enemies against my will."

"They wouldn't do that," I protested.

"To diminish the threat of the Saucers?" he asked me. He gave me a long look and then laughed his mirthless laugh. "Do you really believe they'd hesitate to hand me over?"

Subconsciously my hand slipped down toward the pistol at my belt. I knew this man, for all of his affability was a killer. I felt very much alone.

He read my fear and said, "Don't worry, Burke. I'm not going to harm you. I'm trying to decide what I should do next."

I scowled.

"With money," he told me, "I regain decision. Raimonda will give me none—not after my last break. She'll defend me to the death—but she wants me under her control."

"So we wait here for Marcia," I said aimlessly.

"Marcia—or your companion," he told me. "All we can do is wait."

"Marcia is carrying the dagger your wife shivved her with," I told him. "She has some ideas of her own."

He shrugged, then looked at the shoreline. I followed his gaze and saw a faint stir in the undergrowth that blocked vision into the woods across the flats. Marcia broke through them.

She saw Marcel and waved, then caught sight of me sitting with him and her arm went limp. Gerry got up and cupped his hands and shouted, "The bridge—to your left." She nodded and began to work her way slowly along the shore. I wondered what had happened to Luke Johnson.

I was standing beside Gerry, my hand on the hilt of my gun. I said, "Marcel, I'm going to take you back. If you try anything I won't hesitate to shoot you. You won't die, but you won't be able to run. It's going to hurt like hell, so don't try anything."

I had an uncomfortable feeling that Marcel was the boss, gun or no gun. I didn't like it. Then he said mildly, "I thought we'd take the car and drive around to meet Marcia, if that's all right with you?"

"Okay by me," I said. I made my plan right then. Once we'd picked up Marcia—and maybe Luke—we'd keep right on going back to that barn of an old hotel. At last, I figured, I had this damned job in my pocket.

Marcel was actually humming as he drove slowly back to the fork in the driveway, then took the acute-angle turn to get on the bridge road. The fact he was humming annoyed me—but not half as much as the tune. Instead of some ancient Roman melody it was a boppy novelty piece that had been flooding the airwaves of recent weeks.

When we reached the shore end of the bridge, he pulled the suburban to a halt and my sense of triumph grew. Good old Luke Johnson was waiting there for us, leaning on the rail. His face was bleeding from the underbrush, and his shirt was ripped. He was carrying his jacket over one arm, but he looked good to me.

He came over to the car, mopping his sweaty face, and said, "Afraid I lost her, Avon. But I figured she'd have to head for this bridge sooner or later so I came over to wait. Sorry."

"It's okay, Luke," I told him. "Marcia's on her way here now."

Luke nodded to my chauffeur, then said, "Have any luck?"

"Some," I told him. "This is Gerry Marcel."

Luke looked startled, then a grin spread over his face. He wagged his head and said, "I'm certainly glad to meet you, Mr. Marcel. We've been hunting you all over the U.S.A."

"Somebody should have told me," said Marcel. "I haven't been running away. Quite the reverse."

We heard a faint rustle of someone working toward us along the bank. After

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a while Marcia emerged, swearing in a monotone and revealing a remarkable vocabulary. She stopped short when she reached the road and stared at us. Then she came across and rummaged in her handbag. She pulled out the roll of bills Luke had noticed in the hotel. "Here it is, Gerry," she said. "I hope it does you some good." Then, without warning, she burst into tears.

AFTER putting the wad of bills into a pants pocket Gerry Marcel emerged from the car and held Marcia in his arms, giving her an encouraging hug. He said, "Thanks, *carissima*. I knew you'd come through for me." The remark set her off into a fresh burst of sobs.

"I'm sorry," she wailed, "but it all seems so useless. I get here and you're already under arrest."

"These gentlemen merely wish to talk with me," he told her gently. That seemed to help a little. She lifted up her red and wet face to him and managed to smile.

Luke gave me a nudge. "Come on, Avon. Let's get back to the hotel. From there we can put the show on the road."

I opened my mouth to say, "Come on, people, get in the car." But I never said the words. Why I happened to look up just then I don't know. But I did—and then I couldn't look down or at anything else. I might as well have been put together with cement.

The Saucer came over the trees like a great flat top, its outer rim spinning slowly like the ones I'd seen the day before over Manhattan. It couldn't have been more than a few hundred feet above us. It wobbled a little in flight, but not much, and it didn't seem to be in much of a hurry. All I could think of, looking at it, was the old nursery-rhyme phrase, "like a tea-tray in the sky."

I wondered a little why a Saucer should appear, flying so low, in this isolated locality—and then I was brought back to Earth by a sudden cry from Luke, followed by a gasp from Marcia and the receding thuds of running footsteps on the planks of the bridge.

I tugged out my pistol, but before I could shoot Marcia flung her whole weight on my forearm. Gerry Marcel was running back toward the island and his exile home as fleet as a deer.

"Don't shoot him—don't shoot him!" Marcia was crying.

I just looked at her and stuck my weapon back in its holster. "Come on," I said to Luke and the three of us piled into the suburban.

We were halfway across the bridge when Marcia grabbed my arm. "Look!" she said, her voice low and hoarse with alarm. "Look—the damned thing's stopping over the island."

I risked a quick look and trod on the gas. The Saucer had stopped, all right. It was hovering above the island, motionless, as if it had some sort of antigravity device supporting it. But the outer rim was spinning so fast that it seemed not to be spinning at all.

The Saucer wasn't making any noise. We were barely in time to see Gerry Marcel bolt from vision through the door of the low white villa below us.

"It's coming down," said Luke, peering across me for a better look. "It's going to land right here."

I peered out. Luke was right. The damned thing was growing bigger by the second as it settled slowly toward the turf. I gave the accelerator an extra prod, then slammed on the brakes as we skidded to a halt in front of the house.

This time I didn't ring or knock—instead I went busting right through the unlocked door, with Luke and Marcia at my heels. We stopped in the cool hall and looked around. Raimonda appeared and looked us over. She was still wearing shorts, but she might have been clad in the chain-mail of an Amazon empress.

She looked at me, at Luke, then at Marcia—one, two, three. The barest flicker of annoyance crossed her countenance. She said, "You too?" to Marcia, then, "Come with me. Since you're here we'll have to manage for you somehow. All I want you to do is keep quiet."

Raimonda already had the situation in hand.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RAIMONDA led us into a sort of library off the sun porch where she had received me on my previous visit. She shut the door behind us after a scathing look at Marcia, and left us there. Gerry Marcel was leaning against a far wall, gasping for breath.

He looked at us and shook his head, then managed a faint sort of smile. If I ever saw a guy who looked like death in life, it was Marcel just then. His face was a sort of custard beneath its tan.

"We'd have driven you," I told him just to say something.

"I—couldn't—be—sure," he panted. "They're—here."

He moved quickly to a narrow window that looked out on the front of the house. Following him, I could see the Saucer just settling down on the turf. Even as I watched I could see the whirling outer edge of the weird thing slow to a stop.

Luke Johnson gave a grunt over one of my shoulders and I could hear Marcia's rapid breathing over the other. I moved aside to let her stand in front of me. Gerry Marcel wasn't panting any more. We stood there, not moving, just looking.

A port about halfway up the semi-conical top of the Saucer opened upward, leaving a rectangle of darkness in the round body of the alien ship. Moments later there was a stir of movement in the blackness and first one, then another passenger stepped out.

"I'll be damned!" sputtered Luke. "Look at that!"

I *was* looking, but I didn't bother to answer. I heard Marcia's quick intake of breath, and don't know what sounds I made. What came out of the Saucer was so unexpected I must have made some noise. At any rate Marcel half-turned with one of his eyebrows raised.

What I'd expected I don't know—maybe more reproductions of Gerry Marcel, or maybe just the slugs he had said were the real Centaureans. I know I hadn't expected to see first Ford Whelan, then the President of the United States come jumping to the grass. Moving a little stiffly, they walked slowly toward the house.

"Geest!" exclaimed Luke. "The boss—and the President!" He shook his head and added, "Wonder how they learned to drive that thing, and how they got hold of it."

Something in the way Marcel stared at me brought me to my senses. I looked around the room, spotted a telephone, picked it up and asked for Ford's number in Washington on the direct line. Somehow I wasn't too surprised when he came on seconds later. He said, "Anything wrong down there, Avon?"

I blurted, "Nothing much. I just watched you and the President climb out of a Saucer in Marcel's front yard. Thought I'd check."

"You saw what?"

I said, "Oh-oh," and hung up, meditating a number of things at once. First among them was the amazing ability of the Centaureans to look like anyone and, presumably, anything they liked. Second was the callousness of Ford's order to let them have Gerry Marcel. Third was mild half-conscious interest in the fact that Marcia was turning a bouquet of camelias in a vase so that their faces were toward the window, their backs toward the room. Fourth was to wonder if my pistol was in shape and whether it would do any good.

Luke already had his gun out, saying, "That's not Ford out there?"

I shook my head. "These jokers can imitate anybody they want to."

LUKE whistled softly through his teeth. Gerry Marcel pressed a wall-button and what looked to be a mirror turned into a sort of picture window looking out on the sun porch. I said, "Better shut that—unless you want them to see you."

He gave me a mocking half-smile—his color was better—and told me, "Don't worry—it's one-way glass. An idea of Raimonda's. Sometimes, when we entertain, we like to watch our guests."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I didn't like the idea much but I didn't say anything. At the moment the one-way window was useful. Marcia, very pale but very composed, moved to stand beside Marcel. One of her arms slipped around his waist. In her other hand she was holding the jeweled poniard she had shown me in her Village apartment.

She said, "What's going to happen, Gerry?"

He said, "I don't know—Raimonda's running the show."

"Suppose she turns you over to them?" the artist asked.

Marcel shrugged free of her and moved away. Marcia's face went pink. We forgot about such personal byplay as Raimonda and her visitors moved into view.

Even that close—the Centaureans couldn't have been more than fifteen feet from us—their resemblance to Ford and the President was unmistakable.

Raimonda, looking calm and moving gracefully as a hostess receiving guests for tea, motioned the aliens to the light blue sofa. She had a cigarette in her fingers and her figure, revealed by her russet shorts and russet-and-gold halter, didn't betray nervousness by so much as the quiver of a muscle.

She looked down on them briefly, then said, "Before we begin, you are not the President of the United States—" and then, at the creature's nod, to the other—"and you are not the man you look like, Whalen of the F.B.I. Am I correct?"

I wondered how she knew Ford's name, then recalled that he *had* worked on the Offord murder, however briefly. Her remarkable memory increased my respect for her, if not my liking.

The bogus President spoke, spoke in the President's voice. He said, "I take it your—er—husband has told you something of us."

"What little he knows," she replied. I wondered how we could hear them so well, then spotted a sort of loudspeaker set above the one-way window in the wall. She added, "If you've come here to harm my husband, I can promise you I shan't let you see him."

There was ice in her voice—not the kind of ice you get out of a refrigerator, but the ice that has lain for thousands of years beneath polar glaciers, or in the sunless bottoms of deep caves.

"I'm afraid you don't understand, lady." The voice was so completely Ford Whalen's that I jumped, as did Luke. We looked at each other sheepishly as our pseudo-boss continued with, "Your mate was transferred to our planet by no doing of ours. We treated him well. In return, he killed three of our species. Biting the hand that fed him, I believe you call it."

He had Ford down, even to the tired clichés. It gave me pause, as they used to say, but then Marcia was driving back at them and I forgot everything but this verbal tug-of-war. I wondered how long it would stay verbal.

"My husband," Raimonda said quietly, "meant no harm toward any of you. It was one of your own comrades who asked to taste the wine and, when it killed him, others of you attacked him. Would you expect him not to defend himself?"

THE pseudo-President spoke next. "It is our law that any crime against a member of our species—known to you as 'Centaurean'—shall be punished. Murder—as you call it—is the most serious crime on our planet. For that reason, Mrs. Marcel-O'Keefe, we have traced your husband with great difficulty and at considerable expense in order to bring him to justice."

"You have also levied quite a ransom on the world," said Raimonda, still as cold and sleek as primordial ice.

The Ford Whalen doppelgänger took up the argument with, "We're only trying to make expenses on the way, lady. You can't expect us to keep shoveling it out with no return. We don't want trouble any more than a preacher at a Sunday christening. All we want is your husband."

"So you can kill him for saving his own life?" Raimonda countered. There was a moment of stubborn silence, then

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she smiled and said, "Gentlemen—Centaureans—we shall get nowhere this way. How about a bit of refreshment?"

"You are very kind," said the bogus Chief Executive, managing a bow despite the fact he was sitting down—another trick of the man he was impersonating so perfectly. "However, we are not hungry."

"I had liquid refreshment in mind," said Raimonda. She moved idly to a wheeled aluminum bar and picked up a shaker, poured amber liquid into a trio of glasses, added, "I'm sure we'll all feel better if we relax a moment. We ought to be able to work something out."

"Mirabile!" muttered Gerry Marcel under his breath. Then he cast a meaningful look at me. If the aliens drank the cocktails they would be dead in a matter of seconds. The suspense mounted until it seemed it could not endure any longer. And I suddenly thought of Ford Whalen's telephoned instructions not to do anything to thwart the Centaureans. I transferred my pistol to my right hand.

But the Centaureans declined. It was impossible to tell whether they were suspicious of Raimonda or merely distrustful of all Earth drinks in view of what had happened to their comrades when they came in contact with Gerry Marcel's home brew on their home planet.

Raimonda let her face express polite regret. She said, "I'm sorry, gentlemen, these are rather special." Then she lifted her own glass as if to drink—and threw it directly into the face of the alien impersonating the President.

Gerry Marcel's description of what had happened to the Centaurean who drank his Centaurean moonshine had sounded gruesome—but it was angel cake compared to the reality. Maybe the fact that I was watching a living replica of our own President dissolve before my eyes made it worse—or maybe it was that horrible anyway.

Like Gerry said, he seemed to keep folding in on himself until he became something entirely inhuman. And for some reason, the fact that he did it in silence made it worse. I guess maybe alcohol gagged these creatures—or maybe they put on human speech like their outer appearance and, when the appearance went, speech went too.

But there wasn't time to do much standing around. For a long moment the Centaurean that looked like Ford Whalen just sat there—I guess he couldn't conceive of anyone doing to one of his species what Raimonda Marcel had just done to his colleague.

Raimonda, after a short paralysis like the rest of us, picked up another cocktail glass and got ready to throw it at the pseudo-Ford Whalen. But the Centaurean got to his feet—the way his arms and legs moved was boneless and utterly inhuman. He seeemd to reach right into himself to pull out some sort of weapon he'd been hiding—it was a flat circular disc with a snout.

He did something with it, and for an instant the air seemed to flicker in front of it like it was hot. There was no flame, no smoke, no projectile—but it burned right through Raimonda, between her halter and shorts, like a radar cooker.

I wasn't even conscious of what I did. All I knew was I found myself firing through the window at him. Luke's big pistol was barking at my right elbow. I saw the bullets hit, one after another, but it was like shooting into a sponge. However, the force of the slugs sent our fake boss spinning backward and made him drop his hand weapon. He looked at the window as if he could see us and stooped to pick up his blaster. I figured we were cooked in more senses than one.

I'd been aware of movement behind me and discovered Gerry Marcel had vanished. But just as the Centaurean's phony fingers made contact with the weapon he'd dropped, Marcel raced into view on the sunporch. I never saw a man move as fast as he did then.

With one single motion he seemed to swoop down on the portable bar, seize a bottle of whisky, knocked off its neck and hurled it, spouting liquor in jets, at his wife's killer. The bottle hit him amidships, splashing its contents over him, and shattered on the teakwood floor.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Making no sound, the Centaurean dissolved into a sluglike shape, then into a dark shimmering pool on the floor, then vanished. All that was left of either of the Centaurians was two dark stains on the light wood. I remembered Marcel had told me it was like jellyfish in the sun. They simply weren't there any more.

BUT Raimonda was still there—and what was left of her wasn't pretty. By the time we got there, Marcel was looking down at her, and his face had gone pale again under its tan and looked both stiff and tortured.

I put the spare clip in my pistol as we came onto the sun porch and stooped and picked up the Centaurean handweapon. Luke found another one near where the phony President had dissolved, and picked it up himself. It was a neat little gadget—didn't weigh more than four or five ounces—but I couldn't figure what made it go. I was afraid of setting it off by accident and killing somebody else—maybe myself.

Softly, quietly, Gerry Marcel was cursing in Latin over his wife's body. I could see he was shaken with grief and fury. I didn't know what he was saying, or why he should be so upset over the death of this woman who had kept him a virtual prisoner.

But that could wait. The job was to get him back to sanity. I stepped up and said, "She did it for you, Gerry. Don't foul things up now, or she'll have done it for nothing."

"You don't understand," he said. "She was my wife." His eyes were glazed again, but not with fear—this time it was rage, more rage than I'd ever seen in anybody's eyes before.

It scared me some, but I tried. I said, "I thought in your time nobody owned anybody else. I thought you were free that way."

He had to pull himself back from somewhere red and angry to answer me. He said, like talking in his sleep, "You don't understand. Had she wanted to, she could have left me—but she didn't want to die. And these—" he used some Latin word—"killed her."

He grabbed another bottle and drank from it, long and deep. He laughed his mirthless laugh and said to Marcia, who was watching in horror from the doorstep, "I'm free, *carissima,* after all these years."

Then his face crumpled, and he began to sob like a child.

I went back to the library to telephone. While I was waiting for Ford I could see Luke through the window in the wall, covering Raimonda's mangled body with a cover from one of the chairs.

Ford heard me out in silence. Then he said, "Well, that's done it, all right. Stay right there, all of you, till we can get down to you. That's an order, Avon."

Something in the tone of his voice gave me the tip-off—they were ready to give up Luke and me and maybe Marcia, as well as Gerry Marcel, if the Centaureans demanded it as the price of peace. I felt a chill do a tap-dance up my spine. I said, "Okay, Ford—we'll sit tight." It wasn't the first time I'd lied to him.

I turned to find Marcia was standing there, still white of face, studying me. She said, "Something's happened—something else, Burke. You're frightened—what is it?"

I said, "You're damned well right I'm frightened. As Ford would say, 'we're all gone geese.' We've got to get out of here in a hurry and stay out of sight for awhile. Killing those aliens was a mistake."

Marcia's mouth went perfectly round and she sat down. Then she said, "You mean we're all going to be human sacrifices—like Gerry?"

"Something like that," I told her, "but we've got to get the hell out of here. Come on."

She followed me to the door—I beckoned Luke to bring Gerry Marcel and join me in the hall—and said, "Burke, if we've got to get out of here in a hurry, why not take the Saucer?"

I laughed at her. But I went on out toward the lawn.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

XI

THE Saucer sat there like an immense dust-colored toadstool with no stem—and I couldn't get within twenty feet of it. The barrier was invisible, but it was there. I could put my hands against it and feel it—it was unpleasantly soft, like the inner membrane of an egg—but I couldn't push through it.

I gave it the old football charge—and bounced back. Luke came up then and pushed it, then fired a bullet into it. We could watch the slug as if it were in slow motion. It slowed down and stopped before it had penetrated two inches. Then it came out and dropped to the ground.

Luke looked at me and I looked at him and said, "That's why they couldn't A-bomb the one in Virginia. It's some kind of force-field, I guess."

"What in hell's a force-field?" the practical Luke wanted to know.

"Don't ask me," I countered. "I've read about them somewhere. But we got one right here."

"What's the matter?" Marcia wanted to know. She was still paler than normal but seemed to be reviving a little. I didn't blame her—on the whole I thought she'd showed plenty of guts.

I said, "We can't get at it. Try it yourself."

She did and got nowhere—and then Gerry Marcel moved between us and walked right through the screen. He was carrying a bottle in his hand and tossed some whiskey at it.

"For God's sake!" Luke exclaimed. He hesitated before following Marcel inside. By that time Marcel had reached the Saucer. I let out a yell and ran after him and there was no screen to stop me.

Still swearing in his strange language, Marcel crashed the bottle against the rim of the Saucer like he was launching a ship.

The Saucer didn't dissolve—but the alcohol ate holes in it like it was a piece of cloth in a vat of acid. Where the whisky had splashed, it looked like a piece of bilious Swiss cheese. I got scared and moved back, motioning the others to follow—I suddenly remembered we didn't know how many Centaureans had come in the ship, and whether there were any of them left. I'd seen what their heat guns could do, and I didn't want a hole burned in me if I could help it.

Marcel kept on standing there when we moved back, like he was daring the Centaureans to come out and try to take him. But nothing emerged from the port on the topside, and after a while he turned and walked slowly to where we were waiting. He seemed to see me for the first time and said, "Well, Burke, what's next?"

I said, "We get the hell out of here. We're all in the same boat now. They want us as well as you."

"We've got to bury Raimonda," he said and he might have been talking about moving a piano.

"We haven't time," I told him. "You can come back to the funeral later, when this mess is cleared up. Got gas in that suburban of yours?"

He said, "I filled her up in town—just before I ran into you people at the hotel."

We walked toward it and Luke wanted to know what I meant about all of us being in the same boat. I told him about my little chat with Ford, and his lips pressed tight together. He was thinking of his wife and kids and I knew he wasn't happy about any of it.

I said, "Sorry, Luke, this isn't my doing. Besides, we'll figure out some way of licking it."

"Any ideas?" he asked me as we reached the suburban.

"Just to get the hell out of here pronto," I told him.

"Where to, Burke?" he asked quietly.

"Better move northwest—and keep off the highways," I warned him. "I'll think of something later."

He pressed a foot on the starter and the motor hummed alive.

I got in back; Luke climbed in beside Marcel. That put Marcia next to me. Though I wasn't taking time out to appreciate her just then, I knew that some-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where inside I wasn't sorry about it.

She said, "Tell me, Burke, is this really happening?"

For answer I looked back at the crippled Saucer, sitting immense and serene and alien on that perfect emerald turf. She followed my gaze and shivered visibly.

Then, to change the subject, I asked, "How much dough did you bring him?"

"A lot," she said, and her eyes didn't want to meet mine.

"How much?" I asked again. I had to know how we were fixed. I had about three hundred on me, and I didn't figure Luke would have that much. We had our credentials, with all the free-loading they meant, but I didn't think our buzzers would do us much good from then on. We were outlaws now.

Finally she said, "Fifteeen thousand. It was all the ready cash I could pull out on such short notice."

"That'll help," I told her and settled back to try and think of a way out of the mess we'd gotten into.

Gerry Marcel not only knew how to handle that car—he knew every back road in the district.

DURING the next hour we must have made more than sixty miles. We passed only one filling station. I had been beating my brains out for some course of action that might bring us out of this jam, but so far no good. I smoked half a pack of cigarettes, all I had, and had to bum from Marcia—but my brains remained locked.

Then I felt the suburban give a jounce as it left the tar surface and mounted a concrete pavement. About a quarter mile further on the road took a sharp turn and before we were halfway around it Marcel jammed on the brakes and brought us to a halt.

He pointed ahead. Three hundred yards beyond, by peering out of the side of the suburban, I could see a highway intersection—and a couple of State Police cars in their distinctive paint jobs. We had almost run right into a roadblock.

I opened my mouth to tell Gerry to back around quick, but he was already doing it. In his own world he had evidently learned a lot about evading traps and ambuscades. When we were safely out of sight he drove slowly back the way we had come and said wearily, "What now, Burke?"

Finally my brains began to function. I thought of the only possible thing to do—it was a long chance, but there was no other course of action. I said, "Get back to the filling station we went by before we hit the concrete."

"What are you going to do?" Marcia's full lips were bloodless as she asked the question.

"Make a phone call," I said.

The time was mid-afternoon, and I figured Donald Parton would be back from lunch if he was in at all. But I did some sweating in the tiny booth while I waited for the call to go through—sweating that wasn't all due to the heat by a long shot.

When I got him I played it as cute as I could, not knowing whether this would do any good or not. I outlined what had happened.

He heard out my brief recital, then said, "I've got to know more about this—when and where can I talk to you?"

"If you do, you're crazy," I told him, then gave him a brief sketch of the spot the four of us were in. I waited and sweated some more while he made up up mind what to do.

He said finally, "Dammit, I feel responsible for bringing the Saucers here! I can't sit back and do nothing—my conscience wouldn't let me. Where are you now?"

I told him, as near as I could figure it, while hope did a litttle tap-dance on top of my left ventricle. He said, "Get to Parson's Corners—there's an estate there just south of town—a big white pillared mansion set back from the road. It's named Greenmantle. Tell the servants you're friends of mine, that I'm flying down to meet you there. There's a private flying field in back. I'll pick you up at six."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Thanks," I said, but the word conveyed little of the gratitude I felt. I'd spotted Parton for a thoroughbred and I'd been right. I hoped he and his family wouldn't suffer as a result of what he was about to do.

I picked up a road map from the filling station attendant.

Out of sight of the station we got out a map and tried to figure out how to get to Parson's Corners without walking smack into the roadblock. There didn't seem to be any way of doing it.

It was Marcia, plucking a bit of cigarette paper from her lower lip, who came up with an answer. Tapping the map with a newly-broken fingernail she said, "Half a mile beyond the block is a town —Barker. If I go in there alone I ought to be able to rent a car."

"Yeah," said Luke, "but how we gonna get there?"

"You aren't—I am," she replied firmly. "And we're going on foot. It's not such a long walk—for *you*. I'll meet you just out of town on Highway 1106—that's the route to Parson's Corners."

"You're not going to try to take the suburban through the block," I protested. "They've got her number and description by this time."

"We're leaving the suburban in the woods," she replied. "Put it somewhere the police won't spot it, Gerry."

I began to get her plan and nodded. Just around the curve, he turned the sturdy vehicle into a break in the undergrowth alongside the road, worked it into the trees until it was completely out of sight, either from the road or from the air above it.

WE WORKED our way carefully past the cops and the short line of cars they had halted for inspection. Then Gerry and Luke and I cut left on a dirt road that, according to the map, would take us past the town of Barker and ultimately bring us out on Highway 1106.

Marcia went back to the concrete road and walked boldly along it. We paused to watch her, and she hadn't gone a hundred yards when some joker in a pickup truck stopped and gave her a lift. I began to understand her reference to its not being a long walk—for *us*.

"Smart dame," said Luke approvingly as we went again on our way. "We ought to get out of this jam—but how are we gonna clear up the rest of the mess? Sooner or later we're dead pigeons."

"Luke," I replied, "Don Parton's our only hope. He has scientific genius; he's got influence and he feels guilty as hell about the Saucers. We know they "can be licked and we know how—thanks to Gerry here and his wife—but Parton's the only man who'll listen to us. The rest of them are all too scared to listen to anything just now."

Gerry actually seemed to be enjoying our little game of hide-and-seek with the authorities.

While we kicked up dust on a dirt back road I thought about Raimonda and her strange existence; I thought about the Centaureans and their eye-for-an-eye philosophy.

When we finally stumbled onto the highway, we found Marcia waiting for us in a black sedan of ancient vintage. She said, "I had to fork over five hundred for this heap. Listen to her purr—sounds like a death rattle. But the dealer swears she'll get us to New York."

"New York!" I exclaimed.

Marcia's grin mocked me. She said, "What did you want me to tell him—that we were going to Parson's Corners?"

I subsided and crawled inside. This time Gerry and I had the back seat while Marcia took the wheel with Luke beside her. When we were safely out of the sparse environs of Barker she said, "Lord, what I could do with a mint julep right now!"

"I'd settle for a warm glass of gin," I told her.

We had little trouble finding Greenmantle, nesting pillared and porticoed, behind its apron of lawn and landscaped shrubbery, south of the tiny township.

"You Mr. Burke?" a Negro servitor

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

asked me after we rang the bell beside the big white-paneled front door. At my affirmative, he stood aside and said, "Mr. Parton called and said you was comin'." Then, when he had us safely and luxuriously seated on a rear terrace, "Can I bring you-all anythin' while yo' waitin'?"

It seemed too good to be true. Marcia said, "Well, we might as well enjoy it while we can—see Greenmantle and die and all that sort of thing."

So, after the tenseness and furious action of the day, we sat in the early twilight and quaffed chilled drinks and ate caviar canapés.

The liquor seemed to bring Gerry out of his self-isolation. As he lifted his second julep he looked at Marcia and his eyes gleamed as they had earlier in the day. He said, "Here's to our greatest adventure, *carissima*—and both of us are now free to enjoy it."

Marcia shuddered. Silently she tamped out a cigarette, then cast Gerry a side-long glance. And then, deliberately, she pulled from her handbag the jeweled poniard Raimonda had stabbed her with. She tested the sharpness of its point, pricking the ball of her thumb, then sucked the blood away, looking oddly little-girlish as she did so.

Gerry laughed—more mirthlessly than usual. It was a hollow sound and echoed on our jangled nerves after the gruesome events of the day.

XII

WE HEARD the plane at nine minutes of six by my wristwatch. The colored servant, whose name was Buckhalter, had already pointed out the location of the landing field, beyond a row of tall poplars that marked the end of the garden behind the house.

As we walked through bright beds of flowers, graying in the twilight, toward the strip beyond the trees, I checked my gun unobtrusively, gave Luke a nod to do the same.

Marcia, her husky voice low, said," "Is there going to be more trouble, Avon?" It was the first time she'd used my first name.

I said, "I don't know, Marcia, honestly. It could be anything. It all depends on Donald Parton and what he plans to do."

She shivered a little, though the evening was warm, and walked closer beside me. I knew I ought to tell her to keep away from me just in case, but I needed a little moral support myself just then, so I kept my big mouth shut. We walked through the barrier of trees just as a neat little Cessna cabin job put its rubber on the ground.

Motor roaring, it taxied to meet us. Parton flung open the cabin door from inside. He was alone. "Get in, all of you," he called. I heaved a monumental sigh of relief and stowed my weapon away.

We were off the ground and winging north through the gathering night in less than a minute.

Parton was a good pilot. I've done my share of flying, in and out of the Air Force in peace and war, and I admired the sure touch he had on the controls.

When we were headed northeast again and the sun was just a yellow streak in the west behind us, I said, "Where are we going?"

He looked at me with his lean, homely, good-looking face and said, "I've arranged a practical little hide-out in the Jersey hills. The hue and cry is out for you people."

"Thanks for being damned fool enough to cut yourself in," I said and meant it. He jerked his head to signify it was nothing, and I gave him the works—after all, there wasn't much use in holding anything back at this stage of the game.

He heard me out solemnly, puffing on a pipe he'd pulled out of a jacket pocket. When I had finished, all he said was, "Our Centaurean friends sure sound like a Prohibitionist's delight!"

BY THAT time he was coming in for a landing in dangerous darkness. There were hills all around us and trees beneath, through which a stream wound

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

its silver-blue ribbon. I could see the lights of a few scattered houses dotting the whole panorama beneath us.

It looked like a dangerous landing to me, but Parton didn't seemed disturbed, so I hung onto myself and didn't try any front-seat driving. At the last moment he turned on the searchlight and there, right in front of us, was a fine little landing strip with a hangar off to the left. He brought us down to earth without a bump.

"Nice flying," I said, as he brought the Cessna to a stop in front of the hangar.

"This buggy handles a lot easier than a Dumbo," he replied, and that was all he ever said about what I later found out was a distinguished, if brief, career of flying patrol and rescue missions over the Pacific during a stretch of World War Two when the authorities had let him get out of the laboratory.

Before we got out he said, "I'd like a look at one of those weapons our Centaurean friends used, if you don't mind."

I pulled it out of my pocket and unwrapped the handkerchief in which I'd kept the heat-blaster I'd picked up from the sun porch floor back on the island. I handled it like it was an egg full of TNT. He took it carefully, studied it, said, "Hmmph!" and stuck it casually into his own pocket. "I'll test it tonight," he finished.

A couple of mechanics stepped out of the shadow of the hangar as we left the plane. Parton grinned at them and said, "Thanks, Joe—and Willy. She flew like a dream. Roll her in and keep her ready. We're going to be up at the lodge tonight."

He led us up a winding woodland path to a large low rustic building that turned out to be a sort of flying clubhouse, filled with all sorts of aerial trophies. There were pictures of planes and men in uniform beside them on the walls and propellers and model planes hung from the rough-hewn beams of the ceiling. The furniture was rustic and comfortable.

Parton sat us down and said, "During the weekends this place is full-up. A bunch of us old birdmen keep it going for kicks. But we're the only guests tonight, so make yourselves at home. Bedrooms in back, bar to your left, dining room to your right. Order whatever you want—you must be hungry—and thirsty."

It was Gerry who answered. He got up, looking like a plane mechanic himself in his knockabout costume, and said, "I owe you a lot for this Parton. I guess we all do."

"Not as much as I owe all of you—and maybe the world," said the scientist. He turned like he was going to walk away, then paused and said, "I'm going to start testing this gadget." He gave the heat weapon a careless toss that singed my back hairs with fright, then added, "We've got a work shop downstairs that will pass for a laboratory. I'll be back as soon as possible."

The rustic opulence of the lodge appealed to all of us.

It was our first taste of a millionaire's hangout.

Me, I like luxury. Maybe because I've run into just enough of it in my life and work to be spoiled for anything else. I guess this was why I never got married. I couldn't see myself trapping a rich babe with my kind of bait and didn't want to get chained down with anything else. I nursed my drink and relaxed.

Until the bartender turned on the television for the eight o'clock news. The main headlines had switched from the Saucers alone to the Saucers and us. We were the most wanted characters since the heyday of John Dillinger and Willie Sutton.

ACCORDING to the newscast we were a group of criminal lunatics who had run amok and were endangering the country and the world as a result of the murder of two Saucermen from Centaurus. The accounts of how it had happened were necessarily hazy. There was no mention of the Saucer which Gerry had crippled, or the fact that a Centaurean had killed Raimonda. Her

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

murder was so described that it sounded as if we had killed her for not joining in our attack on the Centaureans.

Luke shook his head unhappily. "I wish I could call home."

I sympathized with him, but shook my head. "Not a chance," I told him. "They'll be bound to pick up a trace somewhere—listen."

The newscaster concluded with, " . . . and while the escape car, a dark green suburban model, has been located some three hundred yards east of a roadblock set up by Virginia State Police outside of Barker, no trace of the fugitives has turned up. Authorities are confident, however, that the quartet will be apprehended within the next few hours. Keep your eyes open for them. At present the Federal Government is offering one hundred thousand dollars for information leading to their capture. Remember—your life may depend upon their being found before the Centaureans make promised reprisals. . . ."

Pictures of us all were flashed on the screen—Luke with a brush haircut he had sported two years ago, Gerry all slicked up in a soup and fish for some banquet, me with my hair a lot longer than I was wearing it nowadays, Marcia in a bathing suit.

The bartender whistled softly, and for a horrible moment I thought he'd spotted us. Then I saw he was looking at the picture—and decided Marcia in her Bikini briefs was definitely worth a whistle. I gave her a lifted brow and she made a face at me.

"Well," she said, her voice barely above a whisper, "how does it feel to be popular, to be wanted, to be . . .?"

"I'd just as soon not be wanted this way," I replied.

Later, while we were lingering over coffee and snifters of brandy, Donald Parton reappeared. After asking us whether everything was okay, he sat down and lit his pipe. He waited until the steward was out of the room, then said, "That was a friendly little item you handed me, Burke. I got it going—it emits a blast close to one thousand degrees centigrade."

"Ouch!" I said, wincing. "That's eighteen hundred Fahrenheit."

"Right," he told me, nodding. "But you'll never guess what that little gun runs on—my analysis won't be complete till tomorrow morning, but as nearly as I can figure, its reservoir is loaded with a sort of vegetable petrol—something closely akin to alcohol."

"You mean to tell me that alcohol's their deadliest weapon?" I asked.

He hesitated. "Not quite," he said. "For some reason—probably due to the elemental make-up of their home world or worlds—they have never discovered alcohol. But they're on the way."

"You mean gasoline can blast like that?" I asked incredulously.

"With the heat producer that weapon has, it can," Parton replied. "Incidentally, the weapon itself is highly radioactive. No—" he added seeing my worried look —"it's not hot enough to have hurt you, Burke, but the fact it is radioactive suggests they don't consider such elements any more dangerous than we consider oil or alcohol."

"Then why the uranium levy on this world?" Marcia asked.

"Probably because radioactives are as useful and necessary to the Centaureans as oil and gas are to us," he told her. "They seem to be a lot more common—but just as essential. You never heard of a Texan refusing to drill a well because he had all the oil he needed."

"You got a point there," said Luke thoughtfully.

"Why bother with all this?" inquired Gerry somberly. "Why not just spray the whole lot of them with alcohol and be done with them?"

"It's not that simple, Marcel," said the scientist as though explaining to a child, "especially in view of the fact that the Centaureans seem to believe in heavy retaliation for any threat or harm to their own persons.

"We don't know how many of them there are—or how many are floating around above this planet. We don't even know how many they carry in their ships.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If we attempt to destroy any more of them we may simply be inviting universal destruction."

"There aren't so many," said Gerry Marcel narrowly. "They're spread pretty thin. I know that from my captivity. They haven't any cities, or they'd have told me about them."

"Are you sure?" asked Parton quietly. "They might have lied to you, of course."

"I've been trained to estimate the numbers of potential enemies, doctor, in a more exacting school than you—without the aid of aviation or radio or any of the aids your strategists consider vital. These people are like desert dwellers—except that they roam the planets, seeking new fuel to maintain their wanderings."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Parton, eying Gerry with new respect. "Then what's the purpose of their existence?"

SURVIVAL," replied the time traveler promptly. "They told me as much. That's one of the reasons I puzzled them. They couldn't understand why I wanted to grow grain and make wine. Pleasures of the flesh mean nothing to them. They roam to survive and survive to roam."

"If that is so," said Parton, "it would explain their retributive justice—"

"That's guesswork," I put in. "We still don't know how many Saucers are hanging around. We know only that there were just two passengers in the ship that came to the island."

"Perhaps the ships are their homes," Marcia suggested. "Maybe they have one family for each. Sorry—I'm not trying to be whimsical."

Dr. Parton stared at her oddly, "You could be right," he mused. "But what sort of sex and domestic life these creatures could have defies imagination—my imagination at any rate."

He got up and paced to the end of the room and back again. Then he stopped and said, "If survival is their motive in life, and we were to deal them a blow that really endangered it, they might leave Earth alone."

"Maybe we can figure it out by looking at the papers," I said. "They've got accounts of all Saucer appearances on record, here and over Europe, Asia and Africa. Maybe we can put them together with the times of their appearances and come up with a pretty good estimate."

"It's all we can do," said Dr. Parton. "Come along."

It was midnight before we were finished checking the old newspapers in the Lodge library. Then Parton, who had been computing all of our findings, pushed back his chair from the table of untrimmed logs and said, "Well, as nearly as I can figure it out, there are between twenty-four and thirty-six. Not a definite figure, but it'll have to do. Think of it—maybe less than a hundred of the creatures holding our world in thrall!"

"I think we should blow them all to hell. We know their screens can't withstand any sort of alcohol."

"Tell me this," said Parton, looking hard at Gerry, "at the time Dr. Coleman and my tractor beam plucked you from atop your horse on the Anzio Road, had you been drinking?"

Marcel thought it over. Then, his eyes bright with excitement, he nodded and said, "We had just stopped at a wayside tavern to water our horses. I had purchased a jug of Marsala, which was the best the rude place afforded, and was carrying it in my saddlebags. I must have put down the better part of a bottle."

"Then that's how you managed to penetrate the screen around the Centaurean planet during our power breakdown," said Parton. "The beam itself must have been drawn to the nearest large attractive mass—which was their planet—once its source was cut off. You fell through the screen and the Centaureans picked you up. No wonder they were puzzled enough to want to study you."

"They were no more puzzled than I was," replied the Roman.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

XIII

MY BEDROOM was fine, like everything else in the lodge but I couldn't sleep. The events of the day kept rolling in front of me—in technicolor too. I'd be back in Marcia's apartment with those reversed flowers, I'd be looking at her magnificent body, or I'd be standing behind the one-way window watching Raimonda fling her cocktail at the Centaurean—and watching him dissolve as his colleague shot Raimonda.

At this point I got into a borrowed robe and slippers and ambled out to the main salon for a smoke and maybe a drink if the bar was open.

It wasn't—but Marcia was there, sitting curled up in a chair in a robe much too big for her, smoking. I pulled a chair alongside of hers and said, "Hell of a day, wasn't it?"

She said abruptly, "I just had a fight with Gerry. I don't know what it's all about, but I shudder now whenever he gets near me.

I said, "Dear Dorothy Dix," lit a cigarette and waited.

She said, "Damn you, Avon Burke!" and turned so she was looking at me. Then she added, "I feel like such a fool! Here I've been getting romantic over him when he's really no more than an utterly egocentric male with all the morals and fine feelings of an alley cat!"

I looked at her and said, "Well, what did you expect—Julius Caesar and Sir Galahad? Don't be too hard on the guy."

"But he's evil—monstrous," she said hotly. "He doesn't give a hoot about his wife being killed—I think he's really glad."

"Why not?" I countered. "She's kept him a virtual prisoner for years. He's just a little less hypocritical about it than we are."

"You don't mean that," she said evenly. "You can't. I saw your face after it happened. You know she saved him from prison or the electric chair after the Offord murder. Lord knows, I've got no cause to be fond of her—but to let her be lopped off and forgotten. . . ."

"He hasn't forgotten," I told her. "He'll kill every Centaurean he gets a chance at. He wants revenge, but he has no time to grieve."

She snorted. "Sure, because she was something that belonged to him—oh, I know all his fine talk about not possessing anybody, but as long as she was his wife she was his property—like his car or his plane or his motorboat or his fishing tackle."

"I thought you liked being his property," I said softly.

She had the grace to blush. Then she said, "I never thought I'd be discussing my intimate personal affairs with a G-Man, but maybe I didn't really know what being property meant."

"Hold it," I said, "We're way off-course. Did you say a little while back that Gerry Marcel can fly a plane?"

"Something like that," she replied. "He used to be a whiz of a pilot before the Offord murder got him shut up. Why—is it important?"

"I don't know," I told her. "It might be. We're going to need every trick we've got. This battle is just beginning, and we've been incredibly lucky so far. I'd hate to make book on how much longer we can last."

She gave me an odd sort of look and said, "We'll win—you and Dr. Parton aren't going to let us lose."

"Your faith is touching," I replied. "I wish I could share it."

She gave me a steady regard, then told me, "I ought to hate your guts, Burke. Instead, I want you to kiss me."

"Think it will put you to sleep again?" I asked her.

She said, "You are a rat!" and then somehow we were both standing close together and my arms were around her and her arms were around me. She was panting a little when she finally pulled away. Her greenish eyes were shining and she said softly, "Thanks, Avon—thanks a hell of a lot. I had to know I was still in the running."

"You'll do," I told her, not letting her out of the circle of my arms. Her red

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hair just brushed the tip of my nose. "I'm beginning to think the reason I couldn't sleep was because I couldn't bear the idea of your being with Gerry."

She kissed me again, quickly, sweetly. Then, in her husky whisper, put a firm little artist's hand against my cheek, "You really are rather sweet, aren't you, Avon?"

"Some of the creeps I've arrested might not agee with you," I told her. I reached for her, but she slipped clear and moved rapidly toward the door. She was laughing a little as she blew a kiss over her shoulder.

THE next thing I knew it was morning, and Luke was tugging at one of my feet to wake me. He said, "Come on—let's get breakfast. There's a hell of a lot of news breaking."

He wasn't kidding. The search for us was getting wilder by the minute. Somebody had found the dealer who sold Marcia the car in Barker, but the trail ended there. They were still concentrating their search in Virginia and North Carolina, though we had been reported as being spotted in Vancouver, Los Angeles, Denver, New Orleans and Old Orchard Beach, Maine. We were certainly getting around.

Marcia came out while we were wolfing our ham and eggs. Somebody in the lodge had cleaned her dress and shoes and she looked fresh and crisp as the young career girl she had not been for a number of years. She gave me a smiling good morning, did likewise for Luke, who responded to her warmth. But Luke was still worried, like all of us should have been.

He said, "I dunno, what we're gonna do, but we'd better do it quick. Sooner or later they're bound to get onto where we are.

Another announcement came on the dining room screen. The newscaster was in a state of high excitement even for a newscaster, as he said emotionally, "Unless the fugitives are caught and given up by midnight tonight the Centaureans have threatened grave reprisals. A huge fleet of Saucers is assembling south of the nation's Capitol. Observers have counted no less than twenty-seven soaring in over the reservation that has been set aside for them on what used to be Dr. Philip Coleman's estate."

At this point Donald Parton entered. He was wearing beat-up old sports clothes and there was grime on one of his cheeks. He sat down and said, "I just heard the news report over the radio down at the hangar. Apparently our little holding action has stirred things up." He looked almost happy about it.

I said, "You're not kidding, Parton. What are you going to do?"

"Let's see if we can't figure things out. From the report—twenty-seven Saucers—our Centaurean friends are assembling just about their entire Earth-force in one spot, probably with a view to taking whatever retaliatory steps they feel are needed against Washington."

"That doesn't sound very supermanish," Marcia remarked her coffee cup poised halfway to her mouth. "Doesn't it make them rather vulnerable?"

"It does that," replied the scientist, and again I got an impression of satisfaction. "However, considering the tremendous speed and acceleration of the Saucers it isn't as stupid as it seems. If any other part of Earth kicks up a fuss they can put a group of their ships on the spot in a matter of hours."

"You sound as if you've already got a plan," said Marcia.

"I have," he told us, "or rather Gerry gave it to me. He suggested we go after them with an alcohol blitz. Last night I couldn't see it—we couldn't get at enough of them to make them regard retaliation as a threat rather than an insurance to survival." He paused, signaled for some coffee.

"Now most of the Saucers currently dominating our planet are in one place," he went on. "We—or rather I am going in after them."

"Hold on," I put in. "You know as well as I do that this gathering of the Centaureans will be guarded by every precautionary and defensive device our

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

air and ground forces can muster."

He regarded me quizzically, saying, "I'm aware of that. However, the rendezvous they have selected is one of the few localities I happen to know as well as the proverbial back of my hand."

Then, leaning forward and resting a leather-patched elbow on the pine table, "We did a lot of work with radar during the Broad Acres years. That's hilly country down there, and a lot of it is almost inaccessible. There's one channel, low through the hills from the northwest, that blankets all detecting devices completely. I'm going in there and be over the Centaureans before they know I'm coming."

We all looked at each other, not speaking, scarcely even breathing. Parton broke the pregnant silence.

"I've had two of the planes fueled up and rigged alcohol sprayers to their bottoms. We're going in—all but Miss Gannett. She's taken enough risks already."

"I can take a hint," she said, applying her lipstick expertly. Then, while checking her work in a compact mirror, she looked past it toward the door—and froze— Following her gaze I saw Gerry Marcel standing with his arm thrown casually across the slim shoulders of Giselle the dancer, nee Sarah Coon of Cleveland, Ohio.

I HAD no trouble recognizing her, even without the cold cream and headcloth and wrap-around with which she had concealed herself during our meeting a couple of days earlier. There was no mistaking that magnificent little figure, those broad cheekbones and exotic grey eyes, that raven-black hair. It fell to her shoulders, framing a face that was even more striking than I remembered. In a metallic full pleated skirt of many colors and a black linen blouse she was—well, she looked exactly what she was. Even in the morning she wore mascara under as well as over her eyes.

Gerry said, "Hello, people, this is Giselle. She was kind enough to drive all the way out here last night after her show closed."

Marcia went almost as gray as Giselle's eyes, and even Parton was stopped. He managed to mumble, "Miss Giselle and I have already met." Giselle gave him a curl of the lip that might pass for a smile, then looked at me and said, "Hi, G-man," with no smile whatever.

Marcia tugged at my elbow and muttered, "Dammit, how typically Gerry Marcel! This is all my fault, Avon. I should have been nicer to him!"

"You should have done just what you did," I told her. "This isn't an opera, this is real."

"Thanks," she whispered and her fingers lingered on my sleeve.

"Listen, I just came here to be with Gerry," the dancer put in in her flat, nasal, Cleveland voice. "I can let the rest pass over me."

"Good girl," said Gerry. Then, to Parton, "Did I overhear you just now say you're planning to go in through the old Fairfax Ravine with a plane and spray them?"

"You heard correctly," Parton told him. "The government will have radar and anti aircraft and God-knows-what-all set up to protect them—the way we figure it, all the Saucers on Earth have gathered there. It's our one chance to deal them a big blow, and it's the only way we can do it. I'm figuring two planes for the trip."

"You and me—right?" said Gerry. A well pleased alley cat, he was aglow at the prospect of action. Curiously, at that moment, I felt sorry for him. Here he was, trapped in a civilization for which he was totally unfitted. His lack of training had caused the twentieth century to close in on him like a pitcher plant.

At last he had his chance to move again and at one swoop to wreak vengeance on his former captors and his wife's killers. I could envision what a powerhouse he must have been, at the head of his own legions, in his own time. No wonder, I thought, that Germanicus Rutilius Marcellus, even in his brief Roman career, had won mention in the history books. Had his life not been cut off

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by the mischance of Project Parsec, he might even have made himself emperor—or at least headed his own triumph riding in his own chariot through the Forum of his native city.

"I guess it's you and I," replied Parton slowly, "unless Avon here wants to take the controls. But you and I know the locale better."

"I'll ride along as co-pilot," I offered Parton. For some reason I had no desire to share a ship with Gerry Marcel at the stick.

"Good man," said the scientist. "We may need an extra hand before we're done."

I felt Marcia tug at my sleeve, saw her shaking her head at me. The fact she didn't want to go excited me a lot more than the prospect of rough action. I knew it was probably just a bad case of rebound, but plenty of rebounds have been turned into the real thing. She had taken the poniard out of her bag, and was toying with it, turning it over on the table.

"Don't go, Avon," she said. "You'll be killed."

"I'll probably be killed if I don't," I told her. I pulled her hand down and squeezed it under the table. Around us the others had risen to their feet. It was time to put the show on the road again.

And then we heard the cars come racing up to the lodge in the gravel driveway outside. I looked through a window and caught a glimpse of a stony-faced Ford Whalen, sitting in the front seat of a black official sedan. Altogether there were three of them.

"Somebody tipped them off," said Luke, looking at me.

I shook my head and turned to Parton and said, "The stewards—or maybe one of the mechs?"

"Not a chance," he replied. His cool gaze picked out Giselle and there was accusation in his eyes.

She was defiant. Her voice went shrill as she cried, "All right, why shouldn't I? What's a bunch of long-hairs like you against a hundred gees for a girl like me? I told them to come here this morning, but I wanted a little fun first."

"Did you have it?" Gerry Marcel's voice was cold as steel on a winter night. "Did you, Giselle? I'd hate to think of your dying without having had it."

"No!" cried the girl.

"Don't, Gerry!" Marcia exclaimed throatily as he swept the jeweled poniard up from the table in front of her.

Gizelle screamed and whirled, but almost casually the Roman caught her by the shoulder. His grip tightened as he spun her around, directly into the glittering point of the dagger in his right hand. He didn't even thrust it!—letting her impale herself on it instead.

Footsteps sounded outside.

Scarcely looking at the body he said, "Gentlemen, let's be going."

XIV

WE RAN through the kitchen and out a back door that led us to the path that wound down to the hangar in the dale below. Don Parton was leading, but when we reached the edge of the trees that bordered the field I grabbed him and pulled him back and peered out.

My hunch paid off. Nick Ronzetti and Red Dickinson were down there and lining up the three mechanics on duty against the hangar wall. Nick had a submachine-gun cradled in his forearm. They were about thirty feet from us and at the moment their backs were toward us.

Johnson and I sprinted out, holding our pistols clubbed. It had never occurred to me that some time I might be attacking my own comrades. But, come to think of it, they were attacking us.

Out on the field itself a couple of planes had their motors idling and our targets didn't hear us approach. I went for Ronzetti and the submachine-gun—he'd owed me ten bucks for more than a year—and when I got behind him I said, "Sorry, chum," and when he tried to spin around I laid my pistol against the side of his jaw. He went down like the proverbial sack of beans.

One of the mechs must have tipped

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Red Dickinson off that something was up. He turned just before Luke got to him and clipped him a beauty right on the left eye. Luke tried to swing back with his pistol, but Red ducked and pulled out his own gun.

I didn't have time to help, and I figured poor Luke was a goner. He was off-balance from his own swing and Red had plenty of time to drill him—or would have had if Gerry Marcel hadn't come leaping out of nowhere and picked him up and thrown him hard against the panel wall. Red landed on the ground, out cold.

We could hear shouts in the woods behind us as the rest of our hunters reached the path. I headed for one of the planes and scrambled in right behind Parton. I fell flat on my face as the ship took off and somebody helped me into a seat. It was Marcia, her face white.

I said, "You aren't supposed to be along on this jaunt."

And she said, "If you think I was going to stay back there and get caught, you're crazy. I'm in this all the way."

We were in the air by then. I looked around and saw the other plane rising off our right wing with Gerry Marcel at the controls. Behind us, on the field, I could see Luke standing by himself while Ford Whalen and his group erupted out of the trees.

Gerry fell in behind us and we raced over the hills, keeping as close to the ground as possible. My opinion of Don Parton as a flyer rose with every mile we ticked off. He handled that Cessna like it was part of him, whipping it in and out among the hills and valleys.

After a while I lit a cigarette and handed it to Marcia, then lit one for myself. I said, "You know we probably won't walk away from this one, don't you? If the Centaureans don't get us, the Air Force ought to. Why didn't you stay on the ground?"

She gave me a defiant look and said, "Look, soldier, what have I got to lose? My past is in that plane behind us. My present is here—and maybe my future, if you don't think I'm a tramp."

There wasn't much I could say to that. I leaned across the narrow aisle and kissed her, an awkward job under the circumstances. She smiled at me and pushed her hair in place.

Parton called me forward. I sat down in the front seat beside him. I said, "Why in hell did you let her get aboard?"

"Couldn't help it," he replied. "I stood by a moment to see that you and Johnson were okay. By the time I made the plane she was already in. I didn't have time to ask her to step outside."

"Hell of a note!" I muttered, but there hadn't been much he could do about it. Marcia, I decided, was going to be hard to handle at times—if there was going to be any time to handle her at all.

Parton pointed to a lever on the instrument panel and told me, "This little gadget empties the emergency tank. Right now the tank's full of alcohol. When we get over the Saucers we give 'em about ten gallons apiece. She holds two hundred. Want to be bombardier?"

Why not?" I countered. "That'll leave you free to fly her."

After a silence, broken only by Marcia's request for another cigarette, I said, "Why in hell do you suppose Gerry sent for that damned woman? He ought to have known he might blow the whole show apart."

Marcia tried to say something, but I turned around and shut her up with a glance. Parton said, "Burke, you've got to remember Gerry's really a pretty vain man. When Marcia turned him down—and I'm only guesing at that—he called in someone he knew was available."

"I couldn't . . ." said Marcia unevenly, her voice trailing off.

A LITTLE later Marcia tapped my shoulder and pointed up and out the window. I crouched and peered and saw the silver flash of sunlight on a high-flying plane. I nudged Don. He looked across me, forehead wrinkled, then said, "I think it's a regular commercial trans-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

port. But we'd better play it safe. We'll have Air Force jets on our tails before we get there."

I wondered what he meant by playing it safe, but he showed me. We were about a half mile from a range of wooded hills to our left, flying at less than a thousand feet. Don waggled his wings as a signal for Gerry to follow, then swung over and lost himself in the deep shadow cast by the hills in the rising sun.

I doubt if any other plane could have spotted us there in the shadows. At times, it seemed to me, we grazed the tops of the tall trees that rose beneath us and, on our left, above us.

Meanwhile, when hills weren't blanketing us, the radio was alive with clatter about us. While we were swinging across what I like to call the Maryland Panhandle, about a hundred miles west of Washington, there came a general broadcast order grounding all planes except the military. The authorities weren't fooling. Or else they were doing their best to impress the Centaureans with the sincerity of their efforts to catch us.

"It's crazy," said Marcia when she heard it. "Here we are, the only people trying to *do* anything to save the world from these horrible creatures, and just about every human is against us."

"Don't you believe it," replied Don Parton quietly. "Officialdom—yes. But officialdom, since the dawn of time, has almost always managed to get itself into self-destructive spots while seeking to ensure its own survival. But down there—"he gestured widely at the country around and beneath us—"every mother's son and daughter that isn't too scared to think straight is wishing us luck."

"Maybe," replied the woman doubtfully, "But. . . ."

I asked, "How about the rest of the world? Hasn't anybody tried to put up any resistance?"

"From what little I can gather," the scientist told us, "they are all waiting around to see what happens to us. So the whole thing is dumped right in our laps."

"You know, Don," said Marcia, "you're quite a guy. You had no reason to step in like this,"

"I had more than you know," he told her. "You see, with Philip Coleman, I'm responsible for bringing the Saucers to Earth."

Marcia said, "Oh!" not understanding, and then Parton got too busy to explain as a trio of Air Force jets came sweeping out of the sky to the northeast.

Though we were flying low, he flew lower still, seeming about to spin his rubber on the ridgepoles of houses and barns that passed beneath. Looking back, I could see Gerry Marcel following. We roared over a small town that spanned a river, probably the Potomac, and I remember seeing a church steeple flash by, its spire above our level.

I heard Marcia exhale sharply as we skittered over fields and trees beyond the town, panicking cows and chickens. I remember looking back and seeing a straw-hatted farmer on a tractor shaking his fist at us before he disappeared from sight. It was hedge-hopping and then some.

But this time Don and Gerry's evasion tactics failed. Far up above I could see the curve in the trails of the three jets as they sighted us and swung down to the attack. I told Don what was happening—he was much too busy to look for himself just then.

He said, "The next ninety seconds will tell the story. Let me know when they get within range." Then he waggled the ship to warn Gerry that something was up, or rather diving down on us.

MARCIA grabbed my hand and I grinned what I hoped was encouragingly, then peered out the cockpit window for dear life. It was a helpless feeling, sitting like some shooting gallery ducks while those swift jet fighters swooped down.

I waited till I saw orange twinkle along the edge of the leading pursuer's wing as he opened fire. His tracer fell short, but it wouldn't much longer. I gave Parton the office and he swung

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sharply left, then right, then left again while the jets roared past us and up again, unable to operate as efficiently as the Cessna at that low level. Once again the scientist had made the pursuit look silly.

I peered back and saw that the Roman was still behind us, apparently in one piece. Then I went back to watching the jets. They climbed incredibly fast, then swung back to the attack in a lazy curve. This time, when they got within range, Don Parton put the Cessna into a sharp climb, all but stalling her. The jets actually flashed by beneath us. Once again, by following us, Gerry escaped damage.

Before they could dive on us again, Don said, "Well, here we go!" and dived sharply. I let out a yelp and heard Marcia gasp behind me. We seemed to be heading right smack into the side of a hill.

But at the last possible second the scientist leveled off and stood the little plane almost on one wing as he turned left. The hill split in two in front of us and we rocketed through a narrow gorge.

"Fairfax Valley," Parton told us without looking around. "I used to fly it for sport—I guess Marcel did too. Is he okay?"

"Right on our tail," I told him after checking. There was no question of air pursuit now—getting a jet job into that valley was like asking a heavyweight fighter to wear a lace mitten. All we had to worry about next was getting through that winding valley okay and crashing whatever barriers they had to meet us.

We came into a wider part of Fairfax Valley and went right by a battery of 90 millimeter jobs before they could even get their electronic calculators and range-finders going. I can still see those khaki-clad gunners staring up at us with their mouths wide open. They were wearing helmets too—as if we could do any harm to *them!*

We followed the valley in a slow right curve and passed by another battery. This gang must have been warned because they opened fire with their Bofors guns—but they couldn't hit targets that flew twenty feet above them at one eighty miles an hour on the indicator.

"Better get ready to do a little bombing, Avon," warned Don. "We'll be over them in a couple of seconds."

XV

AS We flashed over the crest of a hill we were looking down on the Saucers. I learned later that all twenty-seven of them were there, though I didn't take the time to count them then.

They made an impressive spectacle—hell, let's level, they scared the daylights out of me. All those big concave discs sitting in two rows in a big bowl in the landscape. I suddenly remembered their protective shields and yelled at Don not to fly too low. He nodded and took us up another hundred feet or so.

There was no more ground fire. I guess the Centaureans had ordered the area kept clear of humans and all their gadgets. Above us the Air Force was gathering like a flock of hungry hornets. I had time for one quick look upstairs and there must have been a couple of squadrons of them hovering around, wondering what to do.

Then I was pulling the emergency fuel release—pull, let go—pull, let go—pull, let go and so on. Don took us along the right hand row of Saucers while Gerry pulled alongside and dumped his alcohol on the left-hand row. I didn't look around to watch him, but somehow I knew he was there.

While I was unloading, time seemed to stand still—but when it was over and we were beyond the last of them it didn't seem to have taken any time at all. Don swung us around for a look.

Did you ever stick the lighted end of a cigarette into a piece of paper and watch the hole it burned enlarge slowly before the fire died? It was like that with the Saucers. I'd scored hits on all but one of the fourteen in the row we had covered. I'd missed the first one clean and given the second a double dose, for she was the worst damaged of them all.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There were holes in all the others—big ones where a main charge of alky had landed, little ones where it had splashed. I thought again of Swiss cheese as I looked at them. They were a mess. And so were the thirteen Saucers in the row Gerry Marcel had bombed.

"Look—there's one of them rising!" cried Marcia in my left ear, pointing past me and down at the windshield.

It was the first Saucer—the one I'd missed. Her outer rim was beginning to spin—slowly at first, then faster and faster. While we looked, she rose a little off the ground, then hovered while her whirling rim picked up more speed.

I glanced at the fuel indicator, saw the needle for *Emergency Fuel* was way below empty. "We're out of alky!" I told Don, who nodded and shrugged his shoulders.

"Twenty-six of twenty-seven isn't so bad," he told me.

But our companion, the Roman, had other ideas. He came winging past us on a diagonal passage. He didn't wave—I don't think he even saw us. He was hunched over the controls, his chin set stubbornly, his eyes staring straight ahead.

"He can't bomb it—it's too late!" cried Marcia, grabbing my shoulders with both hands so hard her fingernails bit through my clothes. "Look—it's going to get away!"

I didn't say anything—I couldn't. There wasn't any doubt about what Gerry Marcel was planning to do. He lifted the nose of his little plane as the great wheel that was the Saucer rose higher in the air. One more second and it would zoom out of all possible harm.

But it never got the second it needed. Gerry caught it while still on the rise, and rammed his plane right into that whirling rim. For a moment, both aircraft and spacecraft seemed to hang motionless above the ground. I can still see them, like an elephant attacked by a house-cat, whenever I close my eyes and think about it.

Then Gerry's plane exploded. It splashed gas all over the Centaurean ship, making half of it look like it was on fire. But the Saucer didn't mind heat—it was built to cruise around space and must have been able to stand all sorts of temperature extremes.

It kept right on rising, and Gerry's plane fell off like a cinder and dropped to the ground like a stone. I looked around quickly at Marcia. She was staring at the spectacle like she wanted to close her eyes and couldn't make her lids obey.

Then I heard Don mutter, "What a finish—oh-oh, she's in trouble. Look at her wobble!"

THE Saucer was beginning to flap around like a hunk of laundry in a high wind. And then her spinning outer rim showed blue sky between itself and the main body of the ship. Like a car wheel shedding a broken chain, the flopping Saucer sent its spinning rim flying across the sky.

And then the Saucer went skimming like a scaled plate gone amok, and crashed into the hill lying limp and broken like a Dali watch. I looked at Don and he looked at me and neither of us said a word—there didn't seem to be much of anything to say. Marcia was sobbing quietly behind us, whether from grief or from nervous relief I couldn't tell.

Don brought us down close to where Gerry had crashed and we lit cigarettes and walked as close to the still-steaming wreckage as we could get. There was no question of rescue—the strange visitor had gone out like a Roman candle. Which, in a way, was what he had been.

"Ashes to ashes," murmured the scientist, staring at the smoking ruins of the plane. "I hope he didn't feel it."

"He must have been knocked out by the collision," I replied. Then I turned and went back to Marcia, who had remained by the plane.

She looked at me with all the life gone out of her eyes and asked, "What next, Avon, what next?"

I said, "Stick around and find out." I put an arm around her and held her

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

close and she burrowed against me. Then I looked at the ruined Saucers, wondering if any of their passengers were still alive.

But nothing came out of them then or later—nothing alive, that is.

They came and got us in a flock of olive drab Army cars. No one said much of anything. They knew we'd done something terrific, and they were glad we'd done it and wished they'd had the nerve or opportunity to do it themselves. But they had orders to bring us in under arrest and they had to obey them.

When we rode away a whole horde of men in uniform were beginning to swarm over the crippled Saucers. They put the three of us in the back of a command car with a sergeant driving and a colonel and one-star general on the front seat with him. Nobody talked till we were halfway to Washington. Then the general turned around and said, "If I were President I'd give all of you the Medal of Honor. But I suppose they'll put you in jail instead!"

"That may not be so easy," said Parton quietly and with a confidence that surprised me. I wondered how he figured that.

Then the gneral asked, "What in hell did you use to pierce those invisible screens? They survived an A-bomb."

"Alcohol," Parton told him. "Just plain, old-fashioned alcohol."

FOR a moment I thought the general would explode. Then he seemed to grasp the fact that the scientist wasn't kidding.

He said, "For Pete's sake, Parton, how in hell did you ever get onto that? Excuse me, miss."

"Don't think a damned thing about it," said Marcia graciously.

"We were lucky," Don said. "Burke here dug up Gerry Marcel and got the truth out of him. He'd met our Centaurean friends before and killed one of them accidentally with some homemade wine. By the time Burke had it straight the alarm was out and no one would listen to him. So he got hold of me and we went ahead on our own. By the way, that was Marcel who crashed the last Saucer—if you saw it."

"I watched it on TV we had set up on the hill," replied the one-star general. "So that was Marcel—I used to know him years ago. Thought he was dead. Crazy sort of fellow."

"Maybe," said Don Parton. We stopped talking for a while. Then the general wanted to know about reprisals. Don gave him a quick run-through of his own conclusions, added, "But we were licked for sure if we kept on appeasing them. This way we have us a chance."

"I always did want to wade right in and blast them," said the general unhappily. "But the Pentagon wouldn't hear of it." Then, "Say—what if they come back and send out some more imitation humans?"

"If you meet anybody you think is a Centaurean," Marcia told him, "All you have to do is buy him a drink."

The general laughed, but not for long. He said, "They must have had observers we didn't reach somewhere. What if they develop an antidote for alcohol?"

"Well," said the scientist thoughtfully, "it will take them some time if they ever do do it. Meanwhile, we have their ships or what's left of them—maybe we'll be able to develop a few new weapons of our own."

"That's the best part of it," said the general. "We've got 'em all—right here in the U.S.A. I'll bet the Kremlin is having kittens. Pardon me, miss."

"Think nothing of it," Marcia smiled winningly. "I pass 'em all the time. Cute little furry creatures."

That stopped the general for keeps. Shortly afterward we rolled over the bridge across the Potomac into Washington, D. C. I don't know what I'd been expecting, but certainly not what we got. The sidewalks were packed solid with people and they cheered us like we were a whole flock of presidents on inauguration day.

We were heroes.

I turned to Don and said, "This what you mean when you said maybe they

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wouldn't find it easy to put us in jail?"

"Something like it," replied the scientist. "I don't think we have much to worry about—as long as the Centaureans stay away."

Marcia let out a wounded cry and said, "I must look a mess—and I left my bag in the plane. This is awful, Avon!"

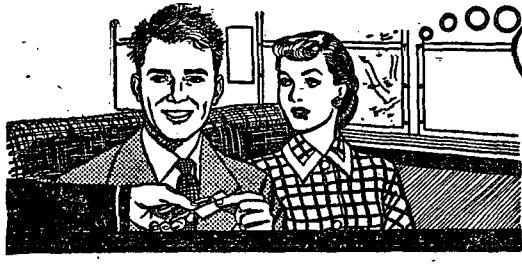
"Simply dreadful," was my comeback, which won me a jab in the ribs. I enjoyed the fact that cool sophisticated Marcia blushed so easily. Somehow it put her more on my own level.

"Well, there's no sense in making a big thing out of the rest of it. We were taken direct to the White House, where the President himself met us and told us wrily he wished his advisors had shown a fraction of our courage and resolution—not to mention ingenuity. Maybe it looked that way from where he sat. To me the whole business was just one step following another. We couldn't have done anything else if we'd wanted to. Result—we were heroes with capital H's.

I'm not a G-Man any more. They gave me a promotion to something called deputy director, and then offered me a spot as crime consultant to one of the big government departments. It pays eighteen gees a year with plenty of expense padding and traveling junkets. All in all I've got nothing to complain about. Along with the medals they gave us our own reward dough to split four ways. Luke Johnson was able to move out of his two-family house into a neat ranch-style job of his own. And I got a whole drawer full of medals from all over the world.

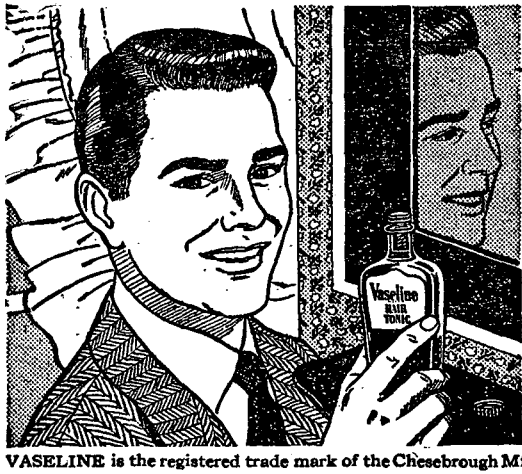
The other day, when I got home, I found Marcia painting for the first time since the whole mess started. I said, "What you doing, honey?" and she said, "It's a portrait of you, darling."

I looked at it and it was the backside of a fig leaf. I went downstairs and poured a Scotch. ❁ ❁ ❁



oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"SAM'S nice, but he'd be a lot nicer if he did something about that Dry Scalp! His hair is dull and unruly—and he has loose dandruff, too! I've got just the ticket for him—'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



Hair looks better... scalp feels better... when you check Dry Scalp

IT'S EASIER than you think! 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic checks Dry Scalp . . . makes a world of difference in the good looks of your hair. It's ideal with massage before shampooing, too. Contains no alcohol or other drying ingredients. It's double care . . . for both scalp and hair . . . and it's economical.

Vaseline HAIR TONIC
TRADE MARK ®

Listen to DR. CHRISTIAN, starring JEAN HERSHOLT, on CBS Wednesday nights.

VASELINE is the registered trade mark of the Chesebrough Mfg. Co., Cons'd

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Gingerbread House

By JOSEPH SLOTKIN

They were part of a lovely legend . . . almost too good to last . . .

HANSEL grew up. And Gretel grew up. It had to happen; it was really inevitable, for children who refused to grow up, even though they were part of cherished and historic legend, were of no use at all to the Party.

So no one dared protest, when the Minister of Health had the Regional Surgeon give the siblings daily injections of thyroid, pituitary extract, testosterone, corpus luteum and Mein Kampf, until necessary maturity resulted. Gretel grew up, and wider, plumper, and more

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

complacent. She became a rosy-cheeked hausfrau, settled as rich cream. Hansel became tall and handsome in a blonde, muscular way; this so pleased the Leader that he made Hansel an important part of his Staff. And all during the Second World War, Hansel was so important that after it was over he almost, but not quite, became a figure in the War Crimes Trials.

Neither Hansel nor Gretel had time to think any more about the little house they had visited one day in the woods. Hansel had been busy learning the best possible military maneuvers, the most effective methods of public speaking and spreading propaganda, and the most impressive way to give the Party salute.

Gretel, too, was constantly occupied—cooking, sewing, and taking care of her twelve little tawny-haired dumpling-cheeked boys—for the production of which, she was given a medal for distinguished service to her country.

And, as luck would have it, shortly before World War III they were both residents of the Eastern Zone. And so again, Hansel was busy learning the best possible maneuvers, propaganda, and ways to say "comrade." He proved so adaptable, that he was rapidly becoming material for War Crimes Trials Number Two, should there be any place left to hold them.

So, one bright warm day, Hansel was sauntering down a country road, on a mission for the district commander. An important communication, sealed in an official brown envelope, was safely tucked away in a secret pocket.

He walked with rather a carefree gait, since this was the first approach to a vacation that he had had in months. The message didn't have to be delivered until the next evening, and Hansel was making the most of his precious hours in the open air. Although he was dressed lightly; wearing only the porous canvas breeches and short-sleeved brown shirt that had once made him a trooper, and now designated his role as "Hero," the heat of the mid-day sun soon caused him to perspire freely.

THE woods on either side of the road looked cool and so inviting. With a fleeting glance about him, Hansel left the dry, cracked mud of the country lane, and plunged gratefully into the cool, leaf-shadowed forest, with its moist, spongy earth and pungent odor of growing things.

His leather boots sank into the soft, steaming ground, soundlessly, as he traveled deeper and deeper into the wood. He took a greedy breath of the fragrant air, and yawned contentedly, then gave an appreciative grunt of sheer satisfaction.

NOW, it chanced that the little cottage where Gretel lived with her twelve children was not far from the place where Hansel had plunged into the forest. The afternoon growing unbearably hot, the over-upholstered mother had been lying on the porch swing, overcome by the humidity, and the strain of doing all the chores about the house. Little Franz, the youngest, was playing leapfrog with his older brothers. The children were squealing with merriment as they jumped about on the grass.

"Children, children, a little less capitalistic noise, please!" Gretel pleaded, her hand raised in unaccustomed exasperation. And the children became strangely subdued, for she had learned that, as formerly she could frighten them with the threat of "letting Mr. Roosevelt get you," now the new swear-word was even more potent.

Then she had a sudden inspiration. Her placid, round face brightened, and her mild eyes shone. She would take the *kinder* for a nice cool walk in the woods. With a weary sigh, Gretel struggled to her feet, and gathered her brood about her. Then, like a mama goose with its downy little goslings, she waddled down the dusty byway, flanked on all sides by hopping, skipping and chattering little boys.

By purest coincidence, Gretel entered the forest at approximately the same place that Hansel had turned off the road. Perhaps there are so many coincidences

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

because they make a good story . . . perhaps because this is a sequel to the fairy tale; a bit late for the sequel, perhaps, but you know how long it takes for news to trickle out of Europe today.

But it happened that Hansel and Gretel met again, years later, in the same forest. *Pravda* would deny it, as capitalistic fantasy, but then, what wouldn't *Pravda* deny?

So, we find Hansel, strolling enraptured through the woods, listening attentively to the plover's call, and the insistent thumping of the bittern—delighted by all the innocent scufflings and rustlings of the wild life about him, and breathing heavily of the flower-scented air.

In an unplotted recess of his brain, a little nerve was vibrating, seeking formerly co-ordinated axons, dendrites and synapses, creating long-forgotten associations that had been buried under years of trying awfully hard to grow up and become a model Party member.

He had been scuffling his feet against the velvety moss, overturning toadstools with the tip of his shoe, when he looked up suddenly, as if an unseen puppet string had jerked his head. From a distance he heard childish voices, and one other voice, vaguely familiar, but somehow changed. The cries grew louder, and seemed to be coming from under his feet.

Then he whirled, and what he saw brought back a flood of suddenly recollected memories—memories distorted, however, and dimly blurred by the intervening years. Breaking through the tangle of vines and downhanging branches, came a flock of little children, followed by a buxom, blue-eyed, fair-haired woman . . . a woman who was too old to be young, too young to be old.

As the children caught sight of the tall soldier, they hesitated shyly, and withdrew into the shelter of their mother's apron, their fingers groping for her plump hands. As for Hansel, he stared and stared, his eyes finally lighting up with recognition.

"Gretel," he cried.

The woman paused, startled, and then her face became flushed.

"Hansel!" she exclaimed. Then they rushed toward each other, and embraced affectionately. As they drew apart, Hansel cast covert glances at the wondering children, and Gretel smiled, watching him.

"Mine," she said proudly. "I married late, Hansel, but I made up for lost time."

He surveyed the group of wide-eyed boys. "They all look like their mother, too," he said gently, and Gretel laughed, pleased.

"You should have seen their father," she burst out, then for a moment, her round face clouded over, and Hansel looked at her pityingly. A small tear rolled down her cheek, but she brushed it away, and smiled at him fondly.

"And you—what have you been doing, Hansel?" she asked.

"Me?" He shook his head. "Let's walk, Gretel, and the *kinder* can follow. Why talk about my doings, or life today—or the war?"

SO THE two grown-up children strolled in a leisurely manner through the sun-flecked forest, followed by twelve little children who had yet to grow up. (If you are wondering how a woman can have twelve children, and all of them can be about the same age, remember the hormones they gave Hansel and Gretel, and how easy it is for modern science to bring about split multi-zygotes. Furthermore, a perfectly possible thing like a recurrence of triplets and quadruplets will seem tame compared to what is to follow.)

Hansel and Gretel didn't talk much, as they walked through the enchanted forest. Perhaps they were thinking wistfully of a time, many years ago, when they had roamed the woods as carefree as two children can be. If their thoughts turned to their strange adventure in the woods, it is no wonder. Who could forget a thing as marvelous as that? Even with the wicked witch.

They say that if two people think of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exactly the same thing at the same time, and they are close together, something is bound to happen. This may or may not be true, but suddenly Hansel looked up. Looked up, and gaped. And Gretel looked up. And they both stopped dead in their tracks. The little ones clustered about them curiously.

There, before their eyes, was a little house—trim and neat, with pretty white shutters drawn back primly from the windows. A brown shingled roof, and a little red chimney. From the chimney came a thin stream of pale blue smoke, rising like a thin finger into the cloudless sky.

Hansel looked at Gretel, his mouth a round **O** of surprise. She looked at him, and slowly nodded her head, her eyes fastened on the little, peppermint-striped door.

With wild shrieks of uncontained joy, the twelve little boys threw themselves at the house. Fritz tested the rainpipe, running his tender pink tongue up and down the part of it that was close to the ground. He licked his lips, and tore off a piece of the pipe—it was made of peanut brittle!

Heinrich pulled off one of the white taffy shutters, and put as much of it as he could into his little mouth, chewing vociferously, little trickles of saliva running over the corners of his mouth and dribbling down his chin. Hermann ran up to the house itself, and pressed an exploring finger against it. Then, taking a jack-knife from his pocket, he dug out one of the gingerbread bricks, and took a huge bite, then another bite, swallowing rapidly.

You can't blame the little tykes, for most of the candy they had been able to obtain until now was gleaned by sneaking into the Western Zone, tugging innocently at a khaki field jacket, and piping in a weak treble, "Any gum, chum?" Or, "Hershey for Hermann, G.I.?"

All this time, Hansel and Gretel were watching like two people in a trance. They saw themselves as they had been years ago, demolishing a little gingerbread house in the woods. For the life of them, they just couldn't move. It was too much, after all these years. Their brains were whirling with lightning-like readjustments to what they saw. But they weren't as young as they used to be, and it took time.

Some of the boys were attacking the frosted window sills. The cinnamon chimney was being threatened by a number of young invaders, who were trying to climb up and confiscate its tempting redness. And little Fritz toddled over to a window, doubled up his baby fist, and with a blitzkrieg-like jab, shattered the sugar panes. Grabbing a jagged piece, the child started to suck on it contentedly.

Then, as if from a great distance, someone had touched off a small string of firecrackers, there came a cracked, querulous wail.

"Why are you eating up my house?" A peevish voice followed the wail.

The children stopped, and looked about, frightened. One by one, they dropped their booty, and crept back to their mother. Hansel was standing with one hand near his hip pocket, where a small but efficient automatic nestled. Gretel was transfixed, her mouth agape.

AGAIN the truculent, complaining voice went on, insistently. "Picking on a poor old woman who's all crippled up with rheumatism. It isn't fair, that's what. No, it isn't fair. But what can one expect these days? If it isn't a foraging expedition, it's unruly youngsters. Well, what is it, this time?"

Hansel momentarily expected a wrinkled, distorted face to come peering from the cracked and gaping window. He stared at the door, waiting for it to open, and a little, gnarled old witch to come through and stand cackling on the threshold.

Nothing of the sort happened, however, and after a hush, the children gradually moved away from their mother, and back to the tempting gingerbread house. But Gretel restrained them with a warning gesture. She motioned to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hansel to precede her, and together the two cautiously tiptoed over to the open window. Hansel peeked in, and when his eyes became accustomed to the dim light within, he detected a slight movement in a corner of the neat room.

There was a rocking chair, its back to him. It was swaying gently, rocking back and forth. Over the top of the chair's back, protruded a little knot of hair. That was all he could see.

"Hey, in there!" he called. "Is this your house?"

There was no answer. Signaling to Gretel to come along, Hansel tried the peppermint lock on the candy door. It was set back, and unlocked. He grasped the butterscotch knob, turning it gently. Then, with a rapid, violent kick, he threw it open, and leaped into the room.

"Aha! Now I've got you!" the witch cried, and Hansel found himself staring down the curved barrel of an M-3 submachine gun, that was leveled at him in a ninety-degree arc. His dazed eyes followed the barrel of the "grease gun" down to the long-handled stock that slowly appeared from behind the door.

The little, wizened old hag squinted at him, her crooked nose with the sharp nostrils, quivering and twitching. Then her sunken, smoldering eyes lighted up, and slowly she lowered the curved barrel. Her voice, when she spoke, was like the grinding of the gears on a broken jeep.

"Why, Hansel, what are you doing here?"

Hansel frowned, trying not to appear too interested in the weapon she was holding. "What are you doing, going around scaring people with that fantastic gun? I'll bet," his voice was suspiciously casual, "it won't even shoot around corners."

The witch shrugged her scrawny shoulders, ignoring the last part of his remark. "I'm getting sick and tired of repairing my house every so often, every time some tramp comes through the woods," she said defiantly. "I swore I'd get the next person that tried to eat my house." She began to sniffle, a few square tears running down the long nose. "I'm just an old woman, alone in a big forest, and I've got to defend myself somehow."

Hansel was still trying. "With *that* thing? Who ever heard of a gun with a curved barrel?"

She cackled delightedly. "Shows how much you know of your own ordnance. Why, your own Panzers had one during the last war, but it didn't work like this. I just teleported this direct from the Detroit Arsenal."

Hansel's eyebrows lifted. "Well! I suppose you know all about every secret weapon?"

"Oh, there's one you people are better at than even I am," the witch cackled. "I call it the H-C^2."

"H-C^2," Hansel exclaimed, unable to conceal his eagerness. "What does it do?"

"It's a weapon that works in a 380° angle," the witch explained blandly, and cackled as she watched Hansel's mouth open. "You shoot it off, and it goes all the way around and comes back. I call it the 'Human Conquestmotive squared.'"

HANSEL started to say something, then thought better of it, and grunted, "You're acting mighty peculiar. Last time Gretel and I came through here, you tried to eat us. Now you're spouting philosophy and capitalistic propaganda."

Gretel had come into the room timidly, followed by her flock. She smiled shyly as she saw the witch, and held out her hand. The witch took it, pressed it for a moment, and screwed up her old face into a smile.

"Gretel, my dear, tell this big lug here that I've changed. I'm just an old woman, crippled with rheumatism in spite of ACTH. These woods get awfully damp at night. I can't even move around, sometimes."

"I thought we finished you when we threw you in the oven," Hansel was still uncertain, his face wary.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There's an inside switch, that shuts the heat off," said the witch. "I was always falling in, so I had to take some preventive steps, or I would have been baked a long time ago. No, my dears," she cackled, "you didn't bake me, and I didn't bake you. And now, the only thing I use my big oven for is to make fresh gingerbread bricks for my house."

Hansel took his hand away from his hip. "But why this sudden reform?" he queried. "Aren't you a bad witch anymore?"

Proudly, the little old apparition stuck out her chin, and shook her head. "Not by modern standards, anyway," she said.

She hobbled to the table, and began setting out an assortment of fruits, nuts, sandwiches and cakes, pies and cookies. "I'm too old to be bad anymore. I had the wild idea once, that if I ate little children, I would get young again. But I guess I didn't know my geriatrics. Now," she sighed sadly, "I'm afraid I'm outclassed."

She pointed to a map on the wall. "Look at that. Do you suppose I could equal those modern bad deeds? In my wildest and palmiest days, I never dreamed of mass murder on the large scale that's fashionable today. Why, I haven't even got a human skin lampshade in the house, not to mention any confession gas, atomic bombs or Migs. Your dictators and wars are too much for me. They've made me as dated as a horsehair sofa."

Hansel grew cold and threatening. "What's wrong with our Marshal?" he said menacingly, advancing a step toward the old witch.

She cackled. "Nothing, nothing. I'm just an old, old woman, taking things as they come, chattering away about nothing." But Gretel, who had been fastening napkins around the necks of her children, grew suddenly pensive and quiet. She accidentally caught the witch's eye, and the two women nodded ever so slightly, in mutual understanding.

They all sat around the table and began to eat. Hansel proposed a toast to the Red Army and the Kremlin, raising his glass of milk high in the air. But when he went to raise it to his lips, a vile smell assailed his nostrils. He peered into the glass, and choked in horror. It was brimful of congealing blood. He snarled at the witch.

"So you've still got your magic," he accused raspingly. "A fine way to treat guests. And a subtle insult, too."

The witch looked at him innocently. "Is something wrong, my boy?" she asked. Hansel shook his head disgustedly, and turned back to his glass. It was full of milk again, but he set it down without drinking.

"Now for some entertainment," said the witch, after they had eaten the little honeyed cakes and wild strawberry jam tarts and other goodies, and the twelve little *kinder* clapped their hands delightedly. But Hansel looked at her suspiciously.

"No cooking lessons," he warned.

THE witch cackled gleefully. "Never fear, my dear, this is no cooking lesson, but it's educational, just the same." She reached over and pulled a switch. A white screen, like the kind in movie theatres, slowly lowered from the ceiling. She pressed a button, and the room darkened. Gradually, a light appeared on the screen, growing brighter, and finally focusing, became moving, three-dimensional figures in full color, marching across the screen.

Gretel gasped. She strained forward, breathing hard. "That's my Fritz!" she cried: "And Hermann—and Franz, and Heinrich—all my boys, marching!"

The witch croaked behind her, "Just a little space warp trick, my dear, into the probabilities of time travel. Now watch." She pressed still another button.

The scene shifted to a torn-up field, covered with still figures. A faint sound came from the screen. It was the mocking scream of liquid hydrogen guns, propelling projectiles at four miles a second, the roar of jets, the whoosh of paralysis gas. As they watched, a marching column came on the screen, headed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the row of helmeted figures in the distance. Rockets flared, and the column broke up, straggling forward unevenly. The picture on the screen suddenly became larger, as a close-up of the line appeared. There were Gretel's boys, charging forward, hopped up with the strange, new drug the Russians had discovered, that made living automatons out of soldiers, surrounded by the gray, acid mists, and lighted by lurid flares from the shells and bombs.

"Stop! Stop! That's enough;" Gretel buried her face in her trembling hands, and the witch quickly turned on the lights.

Hansel was leaning forward, watching eagerly. As the picture faded, his face registered intense disappointment.

"Aw, what did you have to turn it off for?" he complained. "Just when they were gaining the fortified position, too. It looked like a great battle. I'll bet if the advance had gone on, we could have gained that objective with only a loss of about twenty-five men. There were fifty in that column. That means there were enough to gain the area, and then hold it with a personnel of twenty-five—an ample number, until reinforcements—"

"Wouldn't it make any difference to you who those twenty-five men who didn't take the position were?" Gretel asked, gazing at him in a peculiar manner.

He shook his head scornfully. "What difference do men make? It's the glory of the Red State that counts."

"They were your own flesh and blood, Hansel," the witch said.

"As far as I'm concerned," retorted Hansel, "they could be gingerbread, so long as they helped take the objective. Did you see those curved-barrel guns?" he chortled gleefully, "just like the one—"

The two women exchanged looks. Gretel sighed. She turned to Hansel. "It's getting late, Hansel," she said, putting a hand on his arm timidly.

"That's right," Hansel grinned at the witch. "Say, you're not so bad after all. I've got an azimuth on this place, and you can bet your life we'll be back to get your military secrets. Who knows, they might even make you a general? We need women like you in the Red Army."

"I was here long before there were any armies," the witch croaked, "and I'll be here long after—" She stopped, because Hansel was giving her a strange look.

GRETEL sighed again, and the witch darted a swift glance at her. "My dear," she said softly, "don't you sometimes wish you were back in the days when you and Hansel roamed these woods as little children?"

Gretel frowned, then relaxed, her blue eyes dreamy. "Oh, yes, it was wonderful then. No cares, no wars, no—" she looked at her little children. "But I wouldn't have my *kinder*—my little ones, my darlings."

"They'll make good soldiers," Hansel said, fondling the silky mop of Friedrich's hair. Little Friedrich grinned, and pointed his licorice stick, and went "bang, bang."

"That's right," cackled the witch, "Good soldiers."

Gretel looked at her. The witch looked at Hansel. He was testing the muscle in Hermann's right arm, flexing the little boy's biceps, and nodding approvingly.

Something passed between the two women—a subtle interchange of unexpressed thoughts, and then mutual agreement.

"I *would* like to be a little girl again," Gretel said. "My little ones—my *kinder*—they would be better off if they were—"

"And you, Hansel, wouldn't you like to be a carefree little boy again?" the witch demanded.

Hansel hesitated a moment, as old memories flooded in on him. Then he shook his head. "Little boys are not much good to the Kremlin. No, I'm better off as a soldier."

"Come into the next room a second," the witch said, "I've got some lovely pictures to show you before you go."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Who wants to look at pictures?" Hansel grunted, then suddenly eager, "Unless they're like those time-travel stereos you just showed us."

"These pictures are of you and Gretel when you were as young as these children here," the witch said, flashing a meaningful glance at Gretel.

"Let's take a look, Hansel. What difference do a few minutes make?" Gretel pleaded.

"Well, all right," Hansel assented, and the two rose, and started toward a room in the back of the little house, the children scurrying in their wake, while the witch held the door open for them.

Gretel went in first, eagerly, and then Hansel, a bit reluctantly. They were all looking about curiously, and searching for the pictures, when the door slammed with a bang, and they were locked in.

Outside, the witch cackled gleefully, her shrill voice penetrating the thick wood of the door.

"Let me out! Let me out!" Hansel pounded on the door with his fists.

Quietly Gretel sat down, and drew her children to her. Hansel, after trying the locks many times, stood facing Gretel, his hands on his hips. "Well, aren't you upset about this?" he asked. "So our old friend is still a witch."

Gretel smiled mysteriously. "Sit down, Hansel, we can trust her."

"Trust her!" Oddly, Hansel's voice had risen in pitch, and was almost falsetto. "After what she did last time?" Then suddenly he whirled about, looking at the walls fearfully. "Gretel!" he cried in horror, "The walls! They're spreading out!"

"Are they?" Gretel asked calmly.

He turned, his mouth opened to answer, but stood there, just staring at Gretel, his eyes popping.

"You—you're different," he gasped.

"So are you," she said.

Frantically, he flew to the door, and hurled himself against it. It flew open easily, and he fell into the next room.

"Where are you—you witch?" he shouted angrily. "I'll get you now!" He looked about, but the witch was nowhere to be seen. He watched a little girl come out of the back room. *It was Gretel!*

"The children—where are the children?" he cried.

Gretel handed him six little gingerbread figures. "Here, Hansel. You take Franz, and Friedrich, and Hermann, and Fritz and Heinrich and Felix. And I'll keep Max, and Karl, and Ludwig, and Johann, and August and Rudolph. We can eat them until we find our way out of the woods."

The little boy, Hansel, wonderingly took the small cakes, shaped in human form, and absent-mindedly began to nibble on one of them.

"I don't want to leave the woods," he piped. "I like it here."

As if from a great distance, an old, old voice came to them. "You don't ever have to leave the woods again," it said, "You are part of a beautiful legend, and legends should not grow old and become spoiled. You will stay here."

For a moment, there were womanly tears in the little girl's eyes as she watched the little boy. Then she brightened, and skipped lightly across the threshold of the gingerbread house.

"Come, Hansel, it's getting dark."

The little boy obeyed, and followed her down the red flagstones. When they reached the path that ran in front of the house, they turned, with one accord, for one last look. . . .

But the gingerbread house wasn't there! There was just a mass of trees filling the entire space that had been occupied by a magic cottage.

Hansel bent and plucked a pale, lovely little violet, harbinger of spring, and handed it to Gretel with an impish smile.

She took it, and brushed it against the tip of her upturned nose. Bubbling with merry laughter, the two children linked arms, and gaily skipped down the leaf-strewn path—the woodland path.

Past solid oaks, brooding, and swaying willows, moaning; racing lightly in the direction of the setting sun, that was suffusing the western sky with a myriad of mellow colors . . . and all the forest was hushed, waiting for night. ● ● ●

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Divers were taking oysters up and down

The Soul of the Oisuta

By R. BRETNOR

It was D for Diamonds—and D-Day was coming!

IMITATE? Did you say all the Japanese can do is *imitate?* Don't you believe it. Greatest inventor I ever knew was Japanese. Nakajima, his name was —Y. Nakajima. For five years, I've run ads from here to Singapore, and I can't find a trace of him anywhere. If I could, we'd be million—hell, we'd be *billion*aires!

Makes me bawl just to think about it. We missed it by a hair, and it was all her fault—Gwennie Gaudalez's, that is. I was sitting right here in the Hotel Supremo, with Gwennie behind her bar like she always is, when up he came, wearing a funny chicken-brindle suit and pinch-on spectacles.

He handed me a grin. "I am unoccupied Japanese. Also citizen of Honduras and Borivia. You are smart, honest businessman, oh-yes?"

I gave him the fish-eye—that 'honest' had sort of a Better Business Bureau tinkle to it. But before I could pop back, he'd shoved this pasteboard at me:

MR. Y. NAKAJIMA
CULTURED PEARL KING
PH.D.

(has been) Research Professor Of Oyster Husbandry Dai Nippon Imperial Oyster Institute

I was feeling pretty big-hearted because I'd just pulled a fast deal buying the cargo of the *Weltanschauung*—thou-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sands of bottles of swell wine, a few centavos each! Besides I'd heard of people making real money out of cultured pearls. So I grinned back friendly-like, and told him to kindly spill it.

Which he did. "It is because of oisuta," he said. "Oisuta are open book to Mr. Y. Nakajima. Onry I can understanding oisuta—"

His eyes lit up. Most research professors of oyster husbandry, he told me, studied only the carcass of the critter. But not him. Oh-no! *He* studied the oyster's soul! That was how come he could show me how to make millions out of oysters.

Sure, I tabbed him for a screwball. But I've found it doesn't do to let on in too big a hurry. "So?" I said.

"*Ssso!* I am discovering oisuta are interrigent. I am discovering deep emotion of oisuta. I am discovering to make oisuta most producing I must arouse great filial piety of oisuta!"

ANYBODY ever tell you Orientals hide their feelings? Say, you should of seen this little guy right then. You won't find even an oyster more excited than he was.

"You mean," I sort of snickered, "that you can make oysters give bigger and better cultured pearls by reminding 'em that they love papa?"

At that, he looked real quick over his shoulder. "Pearls?" he said, dropping his voice to a whisper. "Oh-ha-ha-ha-ha! Oh-no! Oisuta interrigent. For Mr. Y. Nakajima, oisuta not producing onry pearls. *Oisuta producing sapphire, ruby, diamon'—all purecious stone!*"

And right away his hand dived down into his pocket and came out with these rocks—

You should of *seen* em! White, red, blue and green. One of each, all more than twenty carats, and full of fire like in a window on Fifth Avenue.

"Oisuta are making for Mr. Y. Nakajima," he said, proud as could be. "But not *big* oisuta. Big oisuta making hundred, two hundred carat—".

Now, you don't go showing stuff like that around a bar in La Paz, Lower California—not if you know characters like Florencio Flaherty, or Poco Garribia who got away with stealing Pancho Villa's horse—or my pal Gwennie Guadalez. Quick as I could I tried to push his hand back out of sight. I was too late.

Now, you've seen Gwennie. Would you think a nice, old fashioned Mae West type like her could cross a room that fast? Yessir, she was right there between us, with her front bumper out over the table, and that hungry barracuda look in her eye.

"Ah, go back to Brooklyn," I growled.

She acted like she didn't hear. Still staring at those jewels, she gave me a big come-on smile. "Sam, honey, who's the friend? How's about interducing us?" Her spike heel found my ankle and went *crunch*. "Move over, honeyboy."

I moved, and she moved in. Next thing I knew, she had the big green stone, holding it up against her blondined hair, trying to get a gander at herself in the bar mirror, and whispering in my ear, "*Deal me in, you lunk.*"

It's no use bucking Gwennie when her heart's set on something. I introduced them, and passed on everything Mr. Y. Nakajima had told me.

She hefted the green stone, and peered through it at the light, and scratched it with the diamond in her ring.

"Not bad for on-the-half-shell, huh?" I said.

"Not *bad*?" Her eyes bugged out. "You nitwit, this emer'ld's wonnerful! It's genuwine. It's *real*!"

That's the only time I've seen Gwennie set up drinks on the house. She ordered a round of tequila collinses, turned her back to me, and got down to business.

"Okay, Perfessor, you're in La Paz huntin' a oyster bed. You're damn near broke, or you wouldn't be propositionin' anybody as crooked-lookin' as Sam here. I foller you that far. Now, what's the pitch?"

Mr. Y. Nakajima looked awful serious. "*Sso.* Must having oisuta bed. Veru

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fine. But must also having twenty-tsousand dollar—"

"Huh?" Gwennie's eyes narrowed down real quick. *"Why?"*

"For gathering oisuta so Mr. Y. Nakajima can teach filial piety. Also for buying *saki* for oisuta. Onry best kind *saki* can making oisuta producing purecious stone." He took a little paper package from his pocket. "Brue powder making sapphire. White powder, diamon'. But onry when *saki* are intoxicating soul of oisuta."

Gwennie whistled. "So every oyster's gotta be a lush!"

"Oh-so. Oh-ha-ha-ha! Evury oisuta getting drunk like skunk. Veru fine."

And then—you could've knocked me over with an oyster feather—

"Perfesser Nakajimmy," she told him, "it's a deal."

SURE, I tried to stop her—and each time I got about as far as "Gwennie, *listen*—" before her elbow caught me in the short-ribs. In two shakes, she'd had Guzman the lawyer hauled in from a cockfight down the street. In a couple more, they'd drawn up a contract about eight pages long and full of Spanish *whereinases*, and we were all signing it.

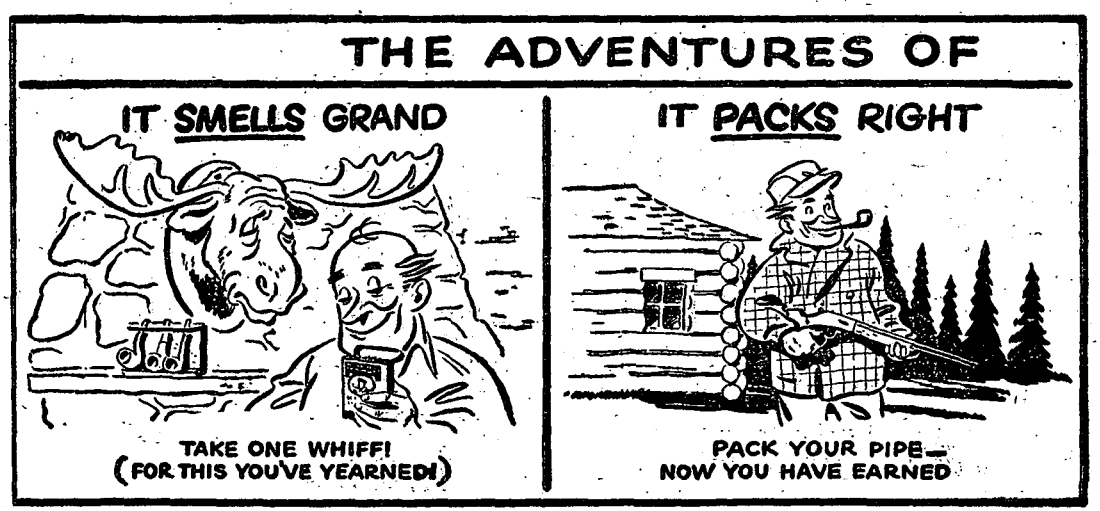
I didn't trust myself to say a word until Mr. Y. Nakajima took his copy and hissed himself out. Then I gave Gwennie a nice, long look like her mother had just bit my leg.

"So now we're the *Baja California Marine Resources Development Corporation,*" I began sweetly. "You're President and General Manager and Grand Exalted Birdbrain. Nakajima is Technical Director so he can play papa to the oysters. I'm Executive Vice-President and Sucker Number One. All we need is a soft, warm oyster bed and twenty-thousand bucks. And guess who's going to find 'em for us—Miss Werewolf of 1921, in person—tucked down inside her little Maidenform."

Those last cracks set her off. "Shut up, you dim twit!" she snapped. "In 1921, I was a babe in arms—and don't ask whose. It's lucky I barged in before you fouled this deal up good. Don't say you would of told this Nakajima guy to peddle his potatoes—not with *them* jools."

"At least I would of fixed it business-like," I said. "Where d'you think we'll get an oyster bed? There've all died off. And twenty grand—my God! Who'll buy the *saki*? Who'll find the scratch to pay the hired hands?"

She got all coy, winking at me until an eyelash came unstuck. "Sammy boy, I *got* the oyster bed. Florencio Flaherty knows where it is. Because I got a mortgage on his boat we'll make a trade. And



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

saki? Say, we don't need no *saki.* What is it gets an oyster high? Alcohol, sweetiepie—just like men. *I know.* And wheres' alcohol? It's in that salvage cargo you just bought."

I let out a yipe. The *Weltanschauung* was full of German wine—the best. During the war, a British cruiser had shot some holes in her. She'd sunk right off La Paz. And all I needed was some new labels to put where they'd soaked off. I stood to make ten times what I paid.

"Okay," said Gwennie, "our oysters get a wine jag. That settles *that.* And so we gotta pay our crew? Well, honey—" She gave me a real personal pinch "—ain't you got five grand left?"

I had—and, because I had, I squealed like a stuck pig. But she convinced me. The *Baja California Marine Resources Development Corporation* got off to a flying start. Three days later, we had a boat out at the oyster bed, with divers taking oysters up and down, and Mr. Y. Nakajima doing his stuff.

Ten men were prying oysters open, and giving each of 'em a slug of wine. We'd bought a tub of *saki* for Mr. Y., and we didn't let on that his little pals were getting something else. That wine was just the right color, so he never did catch on. As soon as the oysters were laid out on deck, he'd slip each one of 'em a smidgeon of white powder—white because Gwennie wouldn't mess with sapphires and rubies and such truck. Then he'd give 'em this big pep talk in Japanese, all about filial piety, and how he was their papa, and how they had to do just what he told 'em and grow diamonds.

Boy, that alcohol sure did the trick. Those oysters sat there open-mouthed until he finished. Then they snapped shut all together, and you could tell they were just quivering to dive back down and set to work.

EVEN at twelve hours a day seven days a week, it took us almost a month to sow that oyster bed. Two hundred thousand is a lot of oysters, believe me. And every evening we'd sit around the bar and total up.

"Sixteen days," Gwennie would say, "is a hunerd and twelve thousand oysters, which is sixteen million carats, mebbe more." She'd rub her hands together. "Yahoo! Wait till those De Beers characters get a load of this—them and their diamond mines!"

Mr. Y. Nakajima's method was pretty fast. It only took three months after the oysters went on their big binge. But that three months was rough. We chartered a small powerboat, and almost every day we'd take a cruise out around the bed,

[*Turn page*]

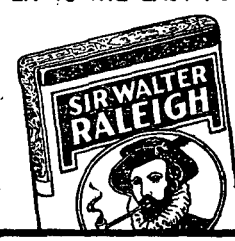
UNCLE WALTER

IT SMOKES SWEET

—HAPPINESS FOR ALL CONCERNED! —with Sir Walter Raleigh!

IT CAN'T BITE!

SIR WALTER RALEIGH'S BLEND OF CHOICE KENTUCKY BURLEYS IS EXTRA-AGED TO GUARD AGAINST TONGUE BITE, AND SIR WALTER RALEIGH NEVER LEAVES A SOGGY HEEL IN YOUR PIPE. STAYS LIT TO THE LAST PUFF.



It costs no more to get the best!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just to make sure our men were there keeping pirates off. And, every day, Gwennie would tell us how she was going to get a brand new diamond-studded Cadillac with jet-plane fins and more chrome than a Tijuana juke-box to drive to Frisco in.

I had my pipe-dream too. I was going right back to L.A. to buy up every used car lot in town and tell the Better Business Bureau to go fly a kite. SCREWBALL SAM, THE USED CAR KING—I could see it in neons a block high, with a free carnival on every lot, and maybe chest X-rays for the kids.

As for old Nakajima, he just kept gnawing on his nails and begging us to bring up a few oysters to see how things were getting on. It was all Gwennie and me could do to talk him out of it. He couldn't seem to understand that the sight of even one itsy-bitsy diamond would start the crew to thinking that maybe we *weren't* nuts—and hell would pop from here to Mazatlan.

All three of us were worn down to a frazzle by the time D-Day—D standing for diamond naturally—rolled around. None of us got any shut-eye the night before, and we sure didn't waste time eating breakfast. Come sun-up, we loaded a case of pink champagne aboard and started off.

Out at the bed, we found the big boat standing guard, and ordered her to head back to La Paz. And then we waited the whole hundred years it took her to get out of sight.

The moment she was gone, I peeled down to my shorts, slipped on one of those light-weight diving helmets, and ducked over the side. While Gwennie worked the pump, I pried off a couple dozen great big oysters. I didn't worry about sharks or sting-rays or my blood-pressure or anything like that; my mind was full of all those lovely lots and neon signs.

Gwennie and Nakajima snaked me up. I dumped the helmet. I grabbed an oyster from the basket. I opened him. He opened easy, looking mighty proud.

And there it was—

Gwennie was dancing up and down, rocking the boat and yelling, "Two hunerd carats! Tiffany, here I come!" I was trying to kiss her and slap Y. Nakajima on the back at the same time.

So it must of been a minute before I caught on that something had gone wrong somewhere.

Nakajima had the rock, holding it in his hand, and staring, staring, staring at it like he'd seen a spook.

I stared too. It wasn't shining like it ought to have. It wasn't diamond-clear.

"O-open up some m-more," said Gwennie like an old tire going flat.

I opened them all up—and they were all the same. They just weren't diamonds.

They were rhinestones—and third-rate rhinestones at that.

Tears were pouring down Y. Nakajima's puss, and it was quite awhile before he spoke. "Mexican oisuta," he said sadly, "are not interrigent like Japan oisuta."

Then he picked up all those dumb oysters, and thanked them anyhow for trying, and dropped them overboard with a loud splash.

IF SEEING those damn rhinestones hadn't hit both of us so hard maybe we would of tumbled to it right away. But Y. Nakajima said good-by to us soon as we hit the dock, and there was a mail-boat there loading up. I guess he stayed just long enough to get his suitcase and book passage on her.

I wised up when it was too late—that evening when I was mixing me my umpteenth double-Scotch. There's a hell of a difference between a whisky-drunk and one on wine. That goes for *saki* too. And if it's true for men, why not for oysters?

That's right—it was the cargo of the *Weltanschauung*. Our oysters are as smart as oysters anywhere. It was those German wines.

What's that? Where did they come from? Mister, don't ask that question. That's one crack I can't take. *Don't* ask me if they were Rhine wines.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Adelyn showed glimmerings of an outsight

It is a wise child that knows its father—and believes in him. . . .

OUTSIGHT

By COLIN G. JAMESON SR. and JR.

MATHIAS sat in darkness on the veranda of his son's Arizona ranch house, drinking in the cold splendor of the star-sprinkled heavens, dreaming of his youth and of voyages into space which had never been launched.

If only he had not been successful so early in life that the search for adventure was postponed until too late. If only some other obscure chemistry student had stumbled upon duramin, the diamond-hard alloy without which the building of modern interplanetary craft would have been impossible.

The house door slammed. Running footsteps, curiously light for a ten-year-old, announced the presence of Mathias' grandson, Tommy.

"I know something, Grandpa," the boy said importantly.

"Do you?" Mathias said. "You're lucky."

"But I won't tell," Tommy said.

"I wouldn't," Mathias said. "Knowl-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

edge is a rare and precious thing. It should be close held."

"Adelyn said she wanted to tell you, but—hey, look at that shooting star, Grandpa! Gee, do you suppose it *was* a shooting star, instead of a meteorite? I bet it was, Grandpa. Maybe it was like the one in the story, where the people had to be all metal to stand the heat, and their hair was made of wire, and their feet were wheels, and—"

"Yes, son, yes," Mathias said.

"Or maybe it was a satellite that came loose from its orbit," Tommy went on. "Do you think Father's ship is really a satellite, Grandpa?"

"I don't know, son," Mathias said gently. "It's only half an hour till bedtime. If there's anything you want to finish up—"

Tommy was gone, and now in place of dreams there was a vastly horrible memory. It was nine years since Young Mathias had lost his life on that experimental flight to Neptune.

The old man's eyes misted with grief, and the pinpoints of light in the blackness above him became distorted with a bluish aura. His tears did not well solely from the never-ending sense of loss. There was shame, too,—private shame that could not be shared with anyone.

Tonight, for some reason, he found it more painful than ever to admit to himself that the National Interplanetary Committee, in control of all space flights, had been right about his son. From the first the NIC had condemned the Omicron drive, for which Young Mathias and his associates claimed many thousand miles per second, as "contrary to accepted scientific principle." They argued, too, that robodirection, the device which Young Mathias insisted would guide his ship to its destination and automatically return it to launching point in case of human failure, "was incapable of laboratory demonstration." In fact they were coldly suspicious of any scientist who could not disclose the developmental history of a formula and who naïvely maintained that "it had just come to him in the night."

The pompous old dodos! They did not understand that Young Mathias was a genius, that many of his ideas "came to him in the night" by a species of intuition which his father called "outsight," for lack of a more accurate term. Because the old dodos did not understand, they had forbidden the projected attempt to reach Centaurus. And it was only with the greatest reluctance that they had issued a permit for a routine swing around Neptune.

The sickening thing was that the doubts of the NIC had been fully justified. The *Centaurus I* did not return from Neptune in the allotted week. Or in months. Or years.

AS THE NIC disaster report pointed out, the strength of the duramin hull and the time-tested anti-shock and avoidance equipment made it unlikely that *Centaurus I* had been damaged by collision. Either the Omicron drive had malfunctioned and destroyed the ship, or the robodirector had failed. Either way, Young Mathias had been wrong, criminally wrong, and he and 77 others had paid for his error with their lives.

Since young Mathias' wife had died in childbirth a year before the ill-fated launching, his two orphaned children had been left in the care of their grandfather. During the nine ensuing years, Mathias had sat almost every evening on the veranda of his son's Arizona ranch house, not far from where *Centaurus I* had blasted off, watching the heavens, dreaming of his youth, dreading the inevitable moment when someone or something would remind him of his loss and his shame.

Mathias was proud of his grandchildren. It was his heart's hope to make scientists of them, great scientists who would wash away the family failure with great deeds. Tommy reminded the old man physically of his father and displayed a child's romantic enthusiasm for the same things. But he was still too young to distinguish fact from fiction, and his future development could not be prophesied.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Adelyn, the twelve-year-old, was something else. At an early age she had begun to show glimmerings of an "outsight" like her father's. Like him she gave the false impression of being mentally lazy, of resisting the inflow of standard knowledge. Yet when faced with new problems which involved principles or facts with which she presumably was unfamiliar, she produced correct solutions so often that no one but a member of the National Interplanetary Committee could have called it guesswork.

Once, for example, Mathias asked her this question in the course of their daily studies, "What is the predominant gas in the spectrum of—well, Neptune?"

"Methane, maybe," the girl said, apparently without thinking.

"Why do you say that?" he queried.

"Well, it *looks* that way," she said.

"But you've never seen it," he objected.

"I must have heard about it, then," she said. And that was more explanation than he usually got.

It amused the old man to visualize adventurous conditions under which, in later years, Adelyn's mature "outsight" would receive a practical test. His favorite situation was man's first stretch for the stars. On board, Adelyn and himself. The point of no return was passed when drive fuel was discovered to be inadequate for a return trip at the speed of light or anything near it. In fact, from that point the trip back would take 40 years instead of the two-plus which would otherwise have been required.

Mathias would figure and refigure, and probably he would get nowhere. Adelyn would do nothing at all until the turn-around was effected. Yet somehow her grandfather was sure that when course had been set for Earth, she would come out with the saving answer.

Tommy looked like his father, yes. But Adelyn acted like her father. It was to be fervently hoped that she could avoid the sort of mistake into which Young Mathias had been plunged by "outsight."

Sitting on the veranda, Mathias pictured the children inside the house. Tommy, no doubt, was winding things up on his Pilotto Board, completing the calculations for a trip to the Moon or Mars (or Neptune). Or to the stars, where no one had ever gone, or to the sun, where no one would ever want to go.

Adelyn, on the other hand, might be sitting with pencil and paper, drawing. It could be any old pencil—hard or soft, sharp or dull—and any old piece of paper. It made no difference. To Adelyn the pencil and paper were more theatrical props. While she doodled, the actual "drawing" took shape in the apparently empty reaches of her mind—produced by it, etched on it, stored by it for future use. No words. No symbols which anyone else could understand. A mysterious recording of the results of pure thought.

NOW a little breeze had sprung up, and new clouds partially obscured the stars. Mathias shivered. He was about to go inside when he saw that Adelyn was standing by his chair, a silvery shape in the gloom.

"I didn't hear you come out," he said.

"I've been here quite a while," she said. "But you were thinking, so I kept still."

"Well, that was considerate of you," he said. "Learned your lessons?"

"Nope. I can't think tonight," she answered. "I've been dreaming instead."

"So have I," he said.

"I've been wondering about something, too," she added.

"Such as?"

"Well, Tommy rode his pony way up the old canyon road this afternoon, and he found this thing."

Mathias was sure he knew what Tommy had found. He was angry, because the upper canyon had always been forbidden to the children. He wanted to wait until they were older before going into the full explanation of their father's death. Now all they knew was the bare fact that he had met his end on an experimental trip into space.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Tommy's not allowed to go beyond the gate and he knows it," the old man snapped. "Whatever got into him?"

"It—it was my fault," the girl said. "I sent him."

"You *sent* him? Why, for heaven's sake?"

"Well, he was going for a ride, and he was tired of all the old places, so I said, 'Why don't you go up the canyon? There's a secret up there.' I don't know why I said it, but there is a secret up there."

With an effort Mathias regained control of his temper. After all, what difference did it make? You had to go into it sometime.

"Did he find anything?" he asked with a show of innocence. "I mean did he find the secret?"

"There was a big hole," she said. "It's on a flat place. He said the sides were grown over, but the bottom was like glass made out of dirt."

"What did he think the hole was?"

Adelyn laughed. "You know Tommy," she said. "He said a space ship must have fallen there about a million years ago. He thinks if we dig down far enough we'll find the crew in a cataleptic condition, and if we walk within ten feet of them the warmth of our bodies will actuate hypodermics that'll automatically inject them with something, and they'll start borrowing electric life power from us and turn into monsters with tentacles that shoot death rays and fourth dimensional feet that can move their bodies from one time continuum into another, and—and—" She had run out of breath.

"What did *you* think it was?" the old man asked.

"I thought it was the place where Daddy blasted off that—that terrible time," she said. "I've always dreamed about it. Always—since I can remember. It looked just the same."

"Maybe it was the place," Mathias admitted. "Maybe it wasn't, too. I've never told you, because—well, I didn't want to talk to you about the whole thing until you were older. That's why I let you think they started from another part of the country. But they did launch from that plateau a lot of times. They wanted to be far away from people in case the new drive was faulty. 'The Reservation,' we called it," he added reminiscently. "But of course there's no way of telling whether the hole Tommy found was where they blasted off that terrible time, as you call it."

"*You* could tell," Adelyn said quickly. "I don't think it's the right hole any more, though, Grandpa. But you can show me where the right one is. Would you come up and show me tomorrow?"

Her tone was so urgent that Mathias decided to put aside his natural reluctance to visit the tragic scene. He had known all along that this moment would come. He might as well accept it and get it over with.

THE three of them stood on the brink of the hole, where stunted sagebrush straggled over the partially fused rocks and sandy soil. The cup-like depression was about fifteen feet deep at the center and twice that in diameter.

Tommy said excitedly, "I know what's buried down there, Grandpa. It's a time machine, and when we dig it up we'll find that it's suspended in space and nothing can move it, even a bulldozer, and the color of it will be something indescribably beautiful and shifting, and there will be other worldly music with strange warnings, and a smell like a lot of rare perfume all miessed up together, and the only way to open it will be by surrounding it with a field of pure force and readjusting its time-space pattern, and—"

"Yes, son, yes," Mathias said. He wished he had been able to make himself tell Tommy the truth before they left home. To Adelyn he said, "This is the one, all right."

"No!" she said, to his considerable surprise. "The right one is over there." She pointed to higher ground some distance to the west.

"But Adelyn," the old man protested. "I was here. I ought to know where it

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is. You said so yourself." He was mildly aggravated, mostly because of a fleeting fear that age might have betrayed him. "Matter of fact, nothing was ever launched from up there."

"But this isn't the right place, Grandfather," she insisted in great agitation. "Please, Grandfather. I *know* it isn't."

The weariness of the old man's legs did not improve his disposition, but he understood only too clearly how the yearning in the child's heart might have unbalanced her judgment and overstimulated her imagination.

Tommy said, "Oh, is there another one up there? Then there must have been a whole fleet of them. Galactic pirates, maybe. Or spawn from the stars, ready to take root on us and steal our egos. Or maybe they'll set up a degravitation field and we'll float away into space and be satellites. It'd be fun to be a satellite if somebody'd feed you and give you oxygen."

Mathias said, "You'd better give the story books a rest, son, and us, too." With dragging steps he commenced the climb to the higher plateau.

Adelyn and Tommy hurried on ahead.

Sure enough, there was something there. "Grandfather!" the girl called back. "It's ever so much bigger."

Now Tommy was at her side, peering down in front of him. "Wow!" he cried. "Giants, I bet! Probably it was from Jupiter and they were a mile high at first but squeezed themselves down so they weigh like uranium and the ship was so heavy it dove right into the earth and they're still there in caskets, waiting for us explorers to open them up so they can grow back to their full size and conquer the world, except they can't, because they breathe straight chlorine and we'll turn it into hydrochloric acid with water and they won't know we're going to because they never heard of water except when humanoid scientists from Arcturus made it for them in the lab, and. . . ."

HE CHATTERED on, but Mathias had stopped listening. He was on the edge of the hole himself now, panting from his exertions. He saw that it was indeed a mighty hole, fully four times as big as the other. And newer.

"Why, I don't see—I can't imagine —" he stammered.

"If a ship made a hole like that," Tommy said, "it would have to be made of duramin, wouldn't it, Grandpa? Because anything else would bust all over the place and not dig in like that. So you didn't invent duramin after all, did you, Grandpa? Those Jovians had it first. I guess there'd have to be brakes and antishocks, too, wouldn't there, or all the monsters would be killed, unless the caskets were awful well padded."

"It must have been a meteor," Mathias mused, frowning. "But I still don't understand."

"What don't you understand, Grandfather?" Adelyn asked.

"I don't understand why the Government men didn't report it," he answered. "They had a guard on The Reservation till a few years ago. I think they had the idea *I* might try something illegal." He laughed shortly. "Meteors are always reported, and this one was too big to overlook."

"Maybe they thought Father's ship might come back," Adelyn said. "Maybe that's why they had the guard."

"*Father's* ship?" Tommy shouted. "You mean Daddy's ship is down there? I thought it was a satellite or something. Shall I go and get a shovel, Grandpa? Shall I?"

The old man felt the tears start to his eyes. "Take it easy, son," he said gently. He turned again to Adelyn. "Under no circumstances was your father's trip to last more than a few days," he explained. "It was to go out into space, swing around Neptune, and back to earth. The robodirector would have returned the ship in less than a week. Of course I watched for a long time, and the NIC, the disbelieving NIC, may very well have been watching even longer, from what I've heard."

"But couldn't it still have come back afterwards?" Adelyn demanded excitedly.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No, no," the old man sighed. "There's absolutely no possibility. If there had been an accident, *Centaurus I* would have returned at once, if she was capable of return. There was no chance of her drifting about space for years and then coming back. There was no mechanism that could have produced such a result, and there wasn't enough fuel. This is a meteor, that's all. Let's go home. I'm tired." He started away from the crater.

They walked slowly down the hill, threading their way among the rocks and sagebrush and manzanita. "I've always thought," Mathias said, half to himself, "that they were killed by the shock of the blast-off and that the robodirector was destroyed at the same time. It seemed like a terrific blast to me, like the explosion of a small atomic bomb. In fact it was many times more powerful than when they were making the preliminary shock tests with the Omicron drive."

"Maybe it was supposed to be," Adelyn said. Her peculiar tone made Mathias look at her sharply. From the intent expression on her face he received a strong impression that "outsight" was going on beneath the flaxen hair.

That afternoon Mathias was puttering in his laboratory, accomplishing nothing, but making a valiant effort to push memory and its demands into the background. There was a knock on the door and his granddaughter came in. She was dusty and hot, and her eyes were unnaturally bright.

"It isn't any meteor, Grandfather," she said. "I was sure it wasn't."

"How do you know?" he asked.

"I—I borrowed a metal counter kit from that cabinet over there," she confessed. "There were directions on the top. There isn't any iron in that hole, Grandfather, but there's radioactivity. Can't we dig it up? We've *got* to dig it up, Grandfather."

Mathias sighed and faced the inevitable and its inevitable disappointment. He was aware in this moment that he had intended to dig it up all the time.

"Yes, we'll dig," he said. "It can't be what you think it is, but if it were—well, perhaps it would be some consolation to know that they're—home."

THE mining company brought in its rig from Verdeville, and in four days the shaft reached a depth of sixty-five feet. Crowbars then rang on a solid, metallic surface.

"It could be a chunk of titanium," Tommy said. "It could have been started from the stars by teleportation but maybe it got tangified too soon by the atmosphere."

"There are no mines in the stars," Mathias said, as if dealing with a serious suggestion, and as if he knew about mines in the stars. His mind was on other things. "No one has ever been to the stars or even tried to go to the stars."

"I wonder," Adelyn said, with that funny look on her face.

The foreman of the mining crew came up the ladder and said, "The drills won't even penetrate. It must be duramin. Nothing else could be so hard."

"I told you," Tommy said.

"But it's impossible!" Mathias insisted.

"Grandfather," Adelyn said, "in a ship like Daddy's could anyone be alive after hitting the earth so hard it made a hole that big?"

"Perhaps," he said. "The anti-shocks were very powerful. But there would have been no supplies, no air, no nothing. It's been nine years."

"Grandfather," the girl said again. "How many light years is it to the nearest star? Oh, I know. Four."

"About four," he agreed. "To Centaurus. Why do you want to know?"

"I don't know, exactly," she said. "Something's been working at me all the time since the day I sent Tommy up the canyon. Tell me, Grandfather, if you wanted to go to the stars, and the Government people said you couldn't, mightn't there sometime be a chance that you'd—"

"Good Lord!" he breathed, gazing at

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her in stunned wonderment, while the foreman shuffled his feet and scratched his head and spat over the brink of the shaft. "You mean," the old man went on slowly, "that you'd secretly take on supplies for nine or ten years—there and back—and you'd secretly set out for the stars with everybody thinking you were taking a swing around Neptune? And then, somewhere on the way, an accident would happen and actuate the robodirector, and you would return after all search had been abandoned, and you would lie entombed down there unless—"

"Yes," she said. "That's what I mean, Grandfather."

IT WAS days before the hole could be enlarged enough to accommodate the bulky atomic cutters needed to penetrate a duramin surface, and days more before the hull of the buried ship was breached. Mathias, Adelyn and Tommy were on a work stage when the round plug of metal was finally forced inward. There was a swoosh of air and then a strange, prolonged silence, while no one moved and all eyes remained glued on the round black aperture.

The head of a bearded man appeared—bearded and very pale.

"You were a long time coming, Father," Young Mathias said. "We haven't got much leeway left. Did you have to look all over the lot, or what? Of course you figured what we'd done when we didn't come back."

Mathias felt as if he were suddenly in the clutch of a huge, icy hand. "No," he said, his happiness struggling with his realization of how disloyal he had been. "I was terribly stupid, son. Getting old, I guess. If it hadn't been for Adelyn and the outsight—"

"What do you mean, 'outsight?' "

"Well, she dreamed about you all the time, and she decided you'd headed for Centaurus instead, and there was an accident on the way out, and—"

"On the way out?" The bearded man laughed. "It was on the way back the trouble started.

"You made it?" The old man forgot his new shame in the joy of hearing the old shame destroyed. He was overcome with thankfulness and pride.

"Yes, we made it," his son said. "But the Omicron was too low on fuel when we started back. We'd run into a little competition with some—ah—beings, and had to use some juice evading. So I knew we wouldn't have enough fuel for full deceleration on this end unless we wanted to spend about forty years instead of four. I took a chance on the anti-shocks and duramin. And on luck. Hello, luck."

Adelyn, who had been drinking in every word in a sort of trance, said, "Couldn't you tell the whole thing, Daddy? I mean in all those dreams?"

Coming Next Month

HALOS, INC.

a Sequel to

THINGS OF DISTINCTION

by

KENDELL FOSTER CROSSEN

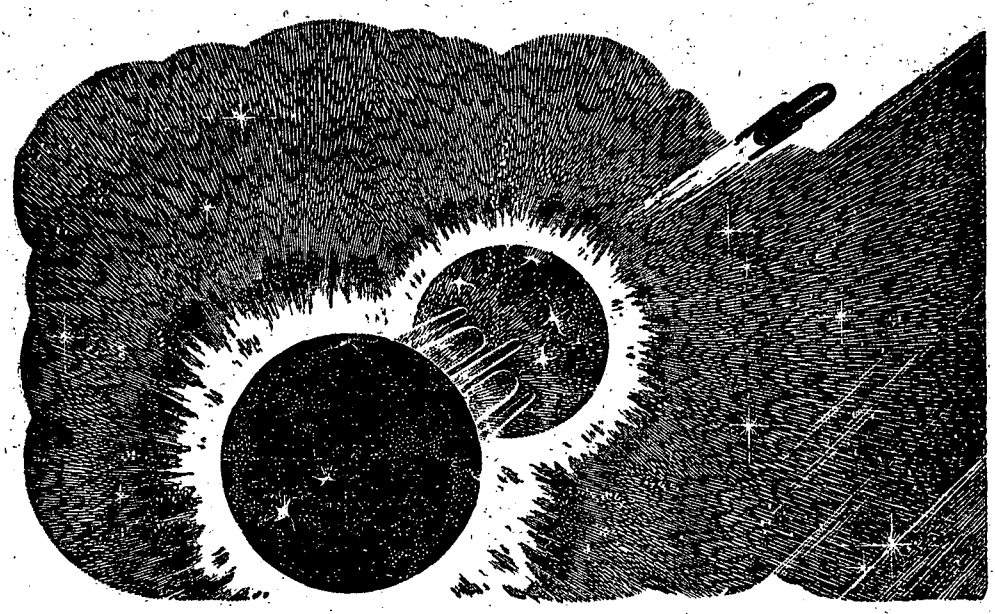
•

Follow the further zany adventures of Crossen's zaniest characters—in a new novel of distinction!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE SHORE OF TOMORROW

a novelet by CHAD OLIVER



Scotsbury carefully refused to focus his eyes

I

How now, Horatio; You tremble and look pale.
Is not this something more than fantasy?
—Shakespeare, circa 1600.

IN THE MIDDLE of nowhere, some seven hundred and ninety million miles from Earth, a man was playing the piano.

He didn't look like the kind of man who should be playing a piano anywhere, and he was known by the singularly unmusical name of Moose Scotsbury. His real name was Earl, though no one used it, and on the roll of the *Ulysses* he was down as a hydroponic engineer, which meant that he looked after the plants in the tank. He was a big, rough, unhandsome man with too much hair on his arms, and except for his eyes he wasn't much to look at. His eyes were different. They were a clear, dark blue, almost black, and when a man looked into them

His Was a Lonely Vigil, a Perilous Mission

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the vacuum sea that sucked around him

he seemed to look into space itself.

Moose was singing lustily, and if he lacked finesse he had rhythm:

Sweet William was buried in one graveyard,
Barb'ra Allen in another;
A rose grew on Sweet William's grave
And a brier on Barb'ra Allen's. . . .

"Hey!" yelled Mark Sandoval, the biologist, clapping his hands. "Get after it, Moose!"

Scotsbury rocked his way through the centuries-old ballad, his big right foot thumping emphatically on the spongized floor, and the men gathered around the piano joined in on the last chorus:

They grew and they grew to the steeple top,
And there they grew no high-er;
And there they tied in a true-lover knot,
The rose clung 'round the bri-er!

Everyone laughed and then grinned

that Set Him Apart from Man and Alien Alike

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

foolishly, the way men will when they catch themselves really enjoying something for a change. Scotsbury rippled through a few chords from Retokin's *Starbound*, and then swung around on his chair.

"Where do we go from here?" he asked.

"Let's have *The Snokapetl Bird,*" suggested Sandoval, clearing his throat. "We were just getting tuned up on old Barb'ra."

"Have to rest up the old fingers a bit first," Moose said, "or I won't be able to burp the plants after I give them their bottle. But I wasn't talking about music then, Sandy. I meant it. Where *do* we go from here?"

"The perennial question," agreed Ralph Heimer, the engineer, a small, thin man with rimless glasses.

"I vote we go to the bar," offered Sandoval, who wasn't much in the mood for the nth rehash of The Discussion.

But the seed had been planted. Every once in a while, whether you liked it or not, it would hit you, as it had hit Scotsbury. You might be doing most anything—drinking your pellet coffee, lying awake in the 'night,' doing your job. You wouldn't be thinking about it consciously, but suddenly there it was. What? Call it drama, wonder, curiosity. The name didn't matter; it had no name.

MAN had been in space for forty years, but that didn't mean what it seemed to mean. Space was still empty, still lonely. No ship alone in an earthly sea was ever so alone as a ship in space. They were still 'exploring' the solar system—a few men, a few ships. Ships cost money, and men who were intelligent enough to be of use were intelligent enough to stay home. There hadn't been any life to speak of found in the system—some dust cacti and unicellular mites on Venus, some mosses and lichens and worms and insects on Mars. No monsters, no gods, no lost cities, no splendidly idiotic traps set by the telepathic lobster-things from Acturus. Just planets, moons, asteroids, meteors.

Just space.

The tri-dis and the newspapers—they still called them papers, although they were no such thing—chattered away glibly about the exploration of space and a revolution in man's knowledge and charting new frontiers. Colleges instituted new courses, only some fifteen years after the fact, which was a record. But when you were *there,* you *yourself,* it was different.

You got to the place where you weren't sure about anything.

It was a strange life, compounded of equal parts of boredom and amazement, routine and unique adaptation—and thus it was a life analagous to life anywhere. Obviously, you couldn't march around playing the hero all the time, nor could you keep gaping at the viewers and exchanging ah-the-wonder-of-it-all clichés. That stuff wore thin in a hurry. And so you filled your time with routine and you talked about other things. You took space for granted—or tried to.

BUT once in a while it came out. For Earl Scotsbury it came out more often than average, because Moose had been trained to think. He had been through a state college, in a desultory sort of way, but he had spent most of his time drinking beer with the boys and Scotch with the girls, and sitting in on piano on Sunday afternoons when the musicians got together. Despite college, the bulk of Moose's education had come from other sources. He read omnivorously, everything from Sherlock Holmes through Huxley to the moderns—Edwardson, Bergholf, and Vargas. He read science fiction, as all the spacemen did. He had a mind, and used it, but he didn't take himself too seriously. He had friends, many friends, and being what he was, he had enemies too.

"Sometimes you wonder what in the hell you're doing out here," he said, grinning.

"We're exploring the Universe," Bob Stein, the computer man, contributed drily. He had just come back from the control room and added by way of ex-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

planation, "Finally got that computer rigged up again; somebody must have been playing with it."

Moose raised his eyebrows, noting that almost the whole crew was now gathered around the piano.

"But what are we exploring it *for?*" asked Mark Sandoval. "Not that it isn't fun and all that."

"Don't *you* think we'll ever find anything?" asked Ralph Heimer. By 'anything,' of course, he meant intelligent life. That was taken for granted.

Mark Sandoval lit a cigarette and breathed smoke out of his nostrils, dragon-fashion. "I've said before, and I'll say again, and still be saying twenty years from now, that intelligent life can't exist in this system except on Earth," he said slowly. "It's not a matter of planetary egotism, it's a matter of linked carbon atoms and unsuitable atmospheric, pressure and temperature conditions. If we ever find a way to dispose of Einstein's limiting velocity of light—some other way than a 'spacewarp' that only helps the fiction writers—then we'll find other Earthlike planets, and we'll find intelligent life of some sort. But until then we're just along for the ride."

The hum of the atomics filled the brief silence, and Scotsbury smiled.

"If that's the case," Ralph Heimer, the engineer, observed, "we can forget it. There must be roughly three hundred thousand planets like Earth in our galaxy alone, and some of them must be much further along than we are. If there's any light-drive, someone would have found it and come to us. I'm afraid we'll just have to struggle along with plain old *Homo sapiens.*"

"Ummm," said Scotsbury.

"Meaning?"

"Well, Sandy, you're the biologist," Scotsbury said. "You say life can't exist except under Earthlike conditions, not intelligent life. That's very interesting. I'm no psychologist, but I was under the impression that they haven't decided what intelligence *is* yet. I'm no biologist, but I understand that they haven't decided what life *is* yet. I'm no philosopher, but it seems to me that it would be hard to define *X* as impossible until you know what *X* is."

"I know, I know," Sandoval admitted. "It sounds dandy. But let's be practical—we haven't found anything. Here we are, coming in for a second look-see at Saturn, and I don't have to tell you about the density and the ammonia and the methane. What *could* exist there?"

Bob Stein grinned. "The Snokapetl Bird," he said.

"I give up," Moose Scotsbury conceded, swinging around again to the piano. "Let's take off together."

HE PLAYED an elaborate, intentionally corny introduction, and they were off on one of the virtually infinite number of versions of the cock-eyed ballad the spacemen had made their own, shunning the official *Far Frontiers* like the plague:

Oh there once was a man. . . .

Mark Sandoval banged out rhythm on his chair, and the ship around them was forgotten.

Oh he stomped on the Moon and he busted up to Mars
And he carved up Venus just to get some good cigars;
Oh he was rough, tough
Gruff and bluff—
And he was made en-tir-ely of atoms!

Fan Turns Pro

NOT so long ago the name of Chad Oliver appeared rather regularly in the back of SS—in the letter columns to be exact. Chad was one of the more active and articulate fans whose letters brightened—and still brighten—that hectic department. Like many another fan, Chad wanted to write, too. Many are called but few are chosen . . . it would seem Chad Oliver is one of the few. With this story we promise to stop referring to him as a fan. From here on, he's a pro.

—The Editor

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The men threw back their heads and gave it all they had, turning the chamber into a clapping bedlam.

Oh there never was a gal in the whole dang system
Oh there never was a gal who ever could resist him;
Oh he was rough, tough—

Moose Scotsbury closed his eyes, his whole body swinging in time with the rhythm from his piano.

Oh he made him a bowling ball from an old asteroid
And he stared down the sun without his polaroid;
Oh! Wasn't it absurd?
He couldn't get started with the Snokapetl Bird!
Hey now, upside down he was, a-hangin' in a crater. . . .

Quite suddenly, the singing stopped. There was a new sound. Moose Scotsbury stood up, not wanting to hear it.

The alarm bell. . . .

Moose Scotsbury had been shipping out to space for sixteen years, and he had heard an alarm bell only once before—on the old *Prometheus*. That time, it had been due to an obvious mechanical failure; the ship had been shaking apart around them. This time, the ship was running smoothly, and that made it much worse.

He followed the others into the control room, which was a place he seldom ventured while on the *Ulysses*. The reason stood before him: Drew Guthrie, in charge of the ship, a trim, well-built man with a too-thin face and a touch of disguised fanaticism in his hard gray eyes. Guthrie was shaken, but he was hiding it. He wasn't alone. Dr. Canada, the UN man, was talking fast and to no purpose as usual, his eyes very bright, and Toney Thomas—he insisted on the 'e' in his first name—was rigid in the pilot's chair, the blue veins standing out like knots on his hands.

There was something else in the control room, a thing without a name. Space had come in close, and the walls of the ship seemed all too thin. Moose felt an ice-fist sock him in the stomach, and no one had to tell him why the alarm bell had sounded.

"All right, men," Drew Guthrie said crisply, "let's not waste any time. I want you all to take a look at this, a *good* look, so we'll all start with the essential facts. I don't have to tell you what it means."

Guthrie gestured toward the survey-charter, a tall, square computer that stood in the center of the control room. The survey-charter took the data that the ship fed into it from multiple electronic pick-ups, digested it, and presented its findings on a panel of graphs and dials. The men gathered around it and stared. They all looked at one dial.

"It's a mistake," Mark Sandoval said tightly.

"No," said Bob Stein, the computer man, "it checks, Sandy."

"Well, I'll be damned," said Ralph Heimer, and lit a cigarette.

Scotsbury just stared at the needle on the dial—the spidery black needle that rested squarely in the positive green. Not just brushing into it, as it had on Mars and Venus, but solidly *into* it.

Activity, life—out there in space.

Bob Stein read off the data. "It's Titan," he said evenly. "There's something on Titan."

Drew Guthrie nodded toward the viewer. "Take a look," he invited, his deep voice a trifle higher than normal.

THEY all looked—looked out, and felt the hollow queasiness inside them as their eyes left solidity and dimension and lost themselves in space. Saturn floated in ink before them, a white and orange stereo miniature with its sharp, thin rings throwing jet shadow-bands across the mother planet. Several of the satellites were clearly visible, but the viewer focus was set for Titan. The great moon—larger than the planet Mercury—hung in nothingness, a vast blue sphere. They could make out the brownish rock mountain formations and the blue-white snow and ice that glittered on the wide plains and valleys. That was all they could *see*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—only the snow and the ice and the rock. But what they *felt*—

Scotsbury swallowed hard. They had found it, found it incredibly, forty years after man had left the Earth. And what was it that he had asked, half in jest, a long time ago?

"Where do we go from here?"

Dr. Canada thought he knew. "It's life—life on another world!" the gray-haired UN representative said uselessly. "We must contact them at once—in peace—historic moment—mustn't be wasted—"

No one paid any attention to him, and Moose felt a little sorry for the man. Men like Canada had been stationed on all the ships for years, against this very eventuality, and now that it had happened the wrong man was on the spot. It wasn't that Canada was wrong, and no one questioned his value or his sincerity in theory. It was just that all jobs, no matter how well conceived, had to be filled by men—and Canada just wasn't the right man. He was ineffectual, academic—and that was too bad.

"Well?" asked Bob Stein, speaking for all of them.

"Question of the week," muttered Toney Thomas, without turning around.

Drew Guthrie smiled, tapping the palm of his hand with one finger. This was his big moment, Moose thought, and he was going to play it to the hilt. "We are now decelerating," Guthrie stated calmly, "and it will be up to us to figure out an operational plan in the next few hours. This is a great opportunity, gentlemen, and we'll not let it get away from us. We're going in, and we're going to find out the whys and the wherefores. Any questions?"

Mark Sandoval hesitated, and then spoke. "Is that wise, sir?" he asked. "Wouldn't it be wiser to pull out and get a special crew in here? If there's really life down there, and we have no way of knowing what it is. . . ."

"I don't see it that way, Sandoval," Drew Guthrie said crisply.

"I'm with Sandoval," Bob Stein said. "We're a survey ship; we're not equipped to handle this. Until we know what we're getting into. . . ."

Drew Guthrie laughed shortly, his gray eyes contemptuous. "Come now, gentlemen," he said bitingly, "we on this ship have discovered for the first time what may be intelligent life beyond the Earth, and you gentlemen—"

He broke off in mid-sentence as the ship jolted sharply under them, throwing them against the walls. The ship lights dimmed, flickered, hesitated. A flashing blue incandescence burst from the space around them, as from a newborn sun.

Someone screamed.

"It looks," said Scotsbury quietly, "as if *they* have discovered *us*."

II

Like two doomed ships that pass in storm
We had crossed each other's way:
But we made no sign, we said no word,
We had no word to say;
But we did not meet in the holy night,
But in the shameful day.
—Wilde, circa 1900.

AS SUDDENLY as it had come, the blue radiance died and vanished. The atomic power plant of the *Ulysses* hummed with renewed vigor, and the lights whirred back to slightly more than normal strength. Slowly, as men unexpectedly brought back from the grave, the men picked themselves up.

"Missed us," Drew Guthrie whispered, his gray eyes charged with lightning. "They'll pay for that."

The others were momentarily silent, letting the import of Guthrie's words sink in. Then they looked at each other, and the meaning of their looks was clear.

"How's the ship, Toney?" asked Mark Sandoval, ignoring his commanding officer.

Toney Thomas nodded his crew-cut head without turning around. "They didn't hurt us that time," he said.

"I'll compute our course and we'll get the devil out of here," said Bob Stein, walking toward the computer.

"Just a moment," said Drew Guthrie, his voice flat.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Moose Scotsbury turned to face his commanding officer, still not offering any comment. He was too glad to be alive. He studied Drew Guthrie's thin face, not without respect, and he thought not for the first time: *The one type of man who should never be permitted within five hundred miles of a ship in space.* He waited, and he was afraid.

Mark Sandoval spoke for the men, calmly, without panic. To some hypothetical observer, it might have seemed that the men in the control room were quietly discussing whether they wanted one lump of sugar or two in their tea. It might have seemed that way—if he had not noticed the film of cold sweat that stood out on each man's forehead.

"Listen, Drew," he said, "I don't think we have much time, so I'll make this fast. We've found life out here in the middle of nowhere, and we're all alone. We've just had a highly convincing demonstration that we're out of our league. We're not going in there, and you're not either. This isn't the Spanish Main, and this isn't mutiny. If this ever went to court, you'd lose your command in nothing flat."

None of the men were armed, but Bob Stein had a wrench in his hand. Scotsbury licked his dry lips and tried hard to swallow nothing. The ship pushed on under them—toward Titan, and Saturn beyond. Scotsbury knew what was coming next, and he knew there wasn't a thing he could do about it.

"Take it easy," Drew Guthrie smiled, dropping into a chair and fishing out his pipe. "Let's not turn this thing into a melodrama. What are you going to do—put me in irons? Set me adrift in an open boat?" He filled his pipe with tobacco, tamped it down, and lit it with an old-fashioned wooden match.

Sandoval grinned sheepishly and some of the tension went out of the room. Scotsbury watched the little drama play itself out, his face expressionless, and all the time his mind was shrieking at him: *Don't let it happen, don't let it happen, don't let it happen. . . .*

"Look," said Ralph Heimer, outwardly more nervous than the others, "I don't know how you feel but I feel like I'm sitting on a big fat H-bomb with a pyromaniac gibbering over the trigger mechanism. Good God, this is no time for a debate!"

"On the contrary," Drew Guthrie said evenly. "May I talk, or is Bob going to bash in my skull with that wrench?"

BOB STEIN, embarrassed, tossed the wrench down to the floor. Moose Scotsbury smiled without humor. He had to hand it to Guthrie—the man had nerve. And he was no fool, whatever else he may have been. Moose listened to his heart thudding in his ears and wondered how much longer he would be able to hear it.

Drew Guthrie smiled again, the pipe clamped firmly in his jaws. "This is no time for petty personalities, gentlemen," he said. "If one of you wishes to take command, you have my permission. You men are scientists, most of you, and I know you don't relish having a military man in charge of things." He held up his hand. "No, don't bother to deny it. I just want to assure you that Sandoval is correct—this is not the Spanish Main. What's more, I'm not Captain Bligh. I simply think that we must stick together in a time like this, gentlemen. I think you are about to make a tragic mistake. Do you want to know why?"

The ship plunged onward through space. Scotsbury looked at Dr. Canada, the one man who should have been able to save the situation. Canada, in the exact problem for which he had been trained all his life, was hanging on Guthrie's words like a schoolboy. He was out of his depth.

"Let's hear it, Drew," said Ralph Heimer. "But *make it quick*, man!"

"It's quite simple," Drew Guthrie told them. "*We don't dare go back.* Use your heads, gentlemen."

"This is no time for riddles," Mark Sandoval said. "You had best have some good reasons, or this ship starts back in five minutes—if we're able to start back."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The ship hummed on nervously.

"It's like this," Drew Guthrie said patiently. "Whatever it is out there has got the range on this ship, right? We're nearer now than we were when they opened up on us. They can fire again at any time, so we're no safer going away from them than coming toward them. That's just common sense. More important, they've demonstrated that they're not friendly, whatever they are, and their science seems to be ahead of ours in some respects. We're dealing with an unknown quantity, gentlemen, and that's dangerous. Not just for us, you see—but for Earth. They can probably track us. When they do, we may never be able to get another ship in space. We wouldn't even know what we were up against. You're scared now, and so am I. That's not important. This is: Do we have the *right* to turn this ship around and run away?"

Silence. Scotsbury clenched his fists helplessly. He was beaten.

"What do you suggest?" asked Mark Sandoval slowly. "What *can* we do?"

Guthrie spoke forcefully, punctuating his words with his pipe. "I suggest we use what brains we've got," he said. "I suggest a compromise. We won't antagonize them, I give you my word. I think we owe it to our race to go in close enough to take a look. That's all. If you're not the men I think you are, then *you* run the ship."

Bob Stein took a deep breath. "We're with you, Drew," he said. "Take her in."

Moose Scotsbury stood absolutely still, knowing that it was no use. He wasn't any hero, and still less of a world-saver. He just wanted to go on living. He looked into Drew Guthrie's cold gray eyes and knew what was coming. He knew, too, that he couldn't avert it. It was no use saying anything.

He said it anyway, "I think you're wrong, Guthrie."

THE ice-gray eyes bored through him like twin needles. "Indeed?" questioned the captain, not troubling to keep the scorn out of his voice. "Why?"

The *Ulysses* swept on toward Titan, still decelerating.

Fool. "Suppose we just turn this situation around and look at it," Scotsbury said. *You're wasting your time.* "Let's just suppose that we're sitting down on Earth, when all of a sudden we pick up an alien ship coming in past the Moon. It's a funny kind of ship to us, and we can't imagine where it could have come from or what could be in it or what it wants. It doesn't try to contact us—just keeps boring in. We get jittery, as well we might. How do we know what it's up to? We decide we'd better let them know that we're not defenseless, just in case. So we launch a warning bomb that goes off in front of them."

"Well?" prodded Guthrie, smiling.

Scotsbury went on hopelessly. "Let's give them credit for having as good a brain as we've got," he said. "What would *we* do if we had warned an alien off and it kept on coming?"

"A sound point," exclaimed Dr. Canada. "Well put, young man."

The kiss of death, thought Scotsbury. *Canada would have to open his big mouth.*

"A very interesting hypothesis, Mr. Scotsbury," said Drew Guthrie, speaking as he might speak to a somewhat precocious child. "May I suggest that you glance at that viewer and tell me what you see?"

Scotsbury didn't answer him, but he saw the others follow Guthrie's pointing finger. The viewer focus was still set on Titan, and the vast satellite swam there in space, dwarfing the ringed planet beyond. The blue of its atmosphere came from hydrogen, with outlying ammonia and methane clouds. Its water lay frozen on its jagged brown rocks. It was cold—cold beyond belief. Guthrie didn't have to press the point: what kind of thing could live in a place like that? How could you possibly assume that you knew how alien life would behave under any circumstances?

"I think you're wrong, Guthrie," Scotsbury said again.

Drew Guthrie shrugged. "I only want

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to take a look, Scotsbury. I feel that we owe those who are counting on us that much. I just want to have a look, and then I'll pull out."

"Will you?" asked Scotsbury quietly.

Drew Guthrie looked at him with his cold gray eyes. "Get out of here," he said, not raising his voice.

"Perhaps we ought to try to contact them by radio," suggested Bob Stein, uncertain again. "What harm could it do?"

"It would just give them perfect target co-ordinates, that's all," Guthrie said. He turned to Scotsbury again. "Some of us have wives and children and people we love on Earth," he said icily. "Some of us think there are other values in life besides our own hides. I'll not tell you again, Scotsbury. Get out of here!"

Scotsbury looked around him at his friends—Stein and Sandoval and Heimer. They all looked away. It wasn't their fault, he knew. They were brave men, all of them, but they weren't big enough to fight a lifetime of conditioning and learned responses. Guthrie had played on them as he might have played on a piano. When he hit the right semantic keys, he got the right emotional chords. Guthrie knew his instrument.

"Good-by," said Moose Scotsbury.

He turned and left the control room. He knew he would never see his friends again, but he didn't look back.

ALONE in the living quarters of the ship, Scotsbury hesitated. Little man, he thought, what now?

He could kill Guthrie, of course, but that wouldn't do any good. In any event, he wasn't that sure of himself. He could not murder a human being on a hunch. On the other hand, he knew Guthrie well enough to know what was coming.

Moose Scotsbury made up his mind. He walked back to the storage room and took down his spacesuit out of the locker. He hooked four extra oxygen cylinders —the maximum load—onto the pack rail and screwed a spare fuel tank into place above the suit jet. He took a deep breath and stepped into the unwieldy mechanism, leaving the glassite faceplate open. He pressed the button combination in his massive gloves and the suit motor whirred into life. Slowly, ponderously, like a being from another universe, he thudded step by rigid step down the hollow tunnel that led to the airlock.

He figured that he had perhaps five minutes of life left to him on the *Ulysses,* and he was afraid. He was doubly afraid, really—afraid that he wouldn't get out in time and afraid he would. He had been adrift in space before, on a repair job, and he wasn't anxious to repeat the experience. And that time, of course, he had known that he would be picked up.

This time he knew that he wouldn't be.

He wasn't running out on them. He had done what he could, and it hadn't been enough. He was not a part of the ship's defense, and the plants would do well enough in the limited time that remained to them. It was simply that Scotsbury had all his life trained himself to put two and two together. Knowledge wasn't any use unless you acted on it, and his own death wouldn't help his friends any.

Scotsbury clenched his fists as he stepped into the airlock and clamped the port shut behind him. He hated the futility of what was happening, hated his own inability to do anything about it in time to avert needless slaughter.

Of course, he really had no choice.

He didn't have long to wait. Sealed into the airlock as he was, he couldn't see the blue incandescence that boiled through space ahead of the plunging *Ulysses.* But he felt the jolt when the ship staggered for the second time, throwing him to the floor. The glassite light went out, and he was alone in total blackness. He fought down the panic that welled up within him. He made himself wait, listening to the blood pound in his ears.

The light came back on, very bright,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Scotsbury clumsily got to his feet. He held his breath, hoping against hope that he was wrong. The slow seconds dragged by in the metal cell. Scotsbury touched the airlock valve, making himself wait.

Sealed in as he was, he could barely sense it when it happened. There was a coughing chug, felt rather than heard, and the ship recoiled ever so slightly beneath his metal-shod feet. Instantly, Scotsbury clamped his faceplate shut and twisted the air valve.

He had not been wrong. Guthrie had launched a nuclear torpedo at Titan.

Scotsbury tried not to think about it. He waited until the air had all hissed out of the airlock cell, and then he activated the outer port. The circular slab slid open and Scotsbury stepped outside. The port closed behind him, but he didn't see it.

Scotsbury carefully refused to focus his eyes on the vaccum sea that sucked around him. He ignored the nausea that turned his stomach upside down in the sudden weightlessness. He kept his eyes on the dials set above the faceplate and his fingers ran rapidly over the combinations in his suddenly fragile-seeming gloves. A light, utterly silent push touched his shoulders with a feather weight and he was in motion as the suit jet shoved him away at a right angle from the ship that had been his home.

He looked back, sealing his mind to everything except the *Ulysses,* now dwindling to a mere two-headed, dumbbell shape almost lost in nothingness. He was already too far away to make out the gravity spin, and he felt his eyes inexorably drawn out beyond, into nowhere. . . .

He closed his eyes. What would they think if they *knew,* Bob and Ralph and Mark? What would they call him now, their companion of only a few short minutes ago? Coward? Traitor? *Could* they understand?

Scotsbury waited, counting the seconds. He kept his eyes shut, but he saw it when it came. Space around him flared into blue radiance as bright as the glare of the naked sun, and his tiny suit was buffeted madly like a leaf in a storm. Then, as suddenly as it had come, it was gone. Scotsbury opened his eyes.

The *Ulysses* had vanished. He was alone.

No, that was wrong. Scotsbury stared and felt an icy numbness crawl down his spine. Her tiny jets flickering with white-hot flame, the shuttle from the *Ulysses* slid out of nothingness and passed him, a mere dot against the infinite. He lost it almost at once against the glare from the frozen moon toward which he was falling.

Scotsbury smiled grimly and turned up his suit jet to full power. He had oxygen for forty-eight hours, and enough fuel to make a landing. The shuttle was in about the same fix, although it had more of an air supply.

There was just one place to go, of course.

Scotsbury fought down a sickness that was not entirely due to space around him. He didn't try to kid himself. The shuttle—not intended as a lifeboat, but used as a space-station-to-planet light transport—had room enough for three men, but no one had to draw any pictures for Scotsbury.

There was only one man aboard. . . .

III

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars—on stars void of human races.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.
—Frost, circa 1930.

HIS mental barrier collapsed, and his every atom exploded into space. That was the way it felt, and Scotsbury screamed once, biting his lip until blood came. He tried to close his eyes but they did not respond. His field of vision expanded sickeningly, wider and wider and *wider.* . . .

He was himself again. Sick and trembling and wet with sweat, but himself. His mind came back. He breathed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a little easier—it had been a quick recovery. The stabilizer in the suit helped some; he still remembered the indescribable horror of being in nothing, with no fixed reference points, feeling the stars spinning eerily in front of his eyes, until they all flowed together and burst in a white eruption that seared the brain. . . .

It was better this time.

Blue Titan waited for him, far below, and yellow Saturn hung beyond, a jewel in velvet set in a thin, fine necklace of light. Little Hyperion was a marble above him, and Rhea was clearly visible between Titan and Saturn. They all combined to give an illusion of light, light that was reflected from his own suit in hard, bright gleams and glitters. He was grateful for them; they gave him something he could fix his mind to, something near, something to grasp and hold with the tenacity of desperation.

He tried not to think of the staring stars around him, the black gulfs, the *nothingness* that wrenched at life, ripping it apart, shredding it. . . .

It was difficult to explain what being alone in space meant to a man. He had tried, once, with Helen, but he had not succeeded. How can you explain colors to the blind, music to the deaf, death to the living? The answer was that you couldn't, but sometimes you had to try, if only to systematize your own spinning brain.

'Space madness' meant nothing; loneliness was a nothing-word. It was simply that *you yourself ceased to exist.* You were reduced to naked bones, shriveled skin, raw red nerves. Your heart floated away from you, still pumping convulsively, meaninglessly, your dead blood nothing in a greater nothing. You were a personality no longer; the *you* was gone. All the little habits, the infinite mannerisms, the peculiar mental processes; vanished. The pretenses, the deceits, the dreams, disappeared. The universe—inchoate, gaping, monstrous—scaled you down to size. *And on that scale you didn't count.* What is a lightning bug to a billion raging suns?

In space, alone, every man saw himself for what he was. It was not a popular experience.

Scotsbury—still decelerating from the velocity of the vanished *Ulysses*—felt the feeble gravitational field of Titan reach out for him. He looked down at the giant satellite, almost half as large as Earth itself, and already space around him was faintly colored, as though seen through a thin blue filter.

He could see the brown rock mountains clearly now, and the snow and ice that carpeted the frozen ground. And even as he watched, he saw a tiny mushroom of white flame flare and die against the cold brown of the rocks.

The shuttle from the *Ulysses* had landed.

SCOTSBURY jockeyed for position as he fell through the hydrogen atmosphere of Titan, wincing slightly as his clumsy metallic suit brushed through hazy cloud bands of methane and ammonia. He was too busy to think, and that helped a little.

Fortunately, the gravity field of Titan was not unduly strong. In fact, despite the great size of the satellite, its tug was only one sixth that of Earth, or about the same as Earth's own satellite. He fell easily through a bitter cold that was almost a tangible thing, slowing himself with his suit jet, and he experienced a curious dual sensation that he had known before. He was two people—one inside the suit, controlling his flight, the other an observer far below, watching the fall with only mild interest.

It was over with uncomfortable abruptness, and Scotsbury stood inches-deep in the blue-white snow of Titan. The knowledge that it was over one hundred degrees below zero on the other side of his faceplate, to say nothing of the methane and ammonia in the atmosphere, seemed curiously unreal to him.

The heating unit in his suit kept him at a constant temperature, and the oxygen from the cylinders filled his lungs. He remembered an apocryphal story

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

about an early arctic explorer who had forgotten how cold it was and had removed a glove in order to pick up a rock. He had miscalculated slightly, and hit one finger against the rock, whereupon the frozen finger had snapped in two.

Scotsbury wasted no time in speculation about the life-forms of Titan; either they would find him before he had a chance to get ready for them or they wouldn't, and he had little or no control over the situation. The landing of the shuttle from the *Ulysses* had both complicated and simplified matters; in any event, it had to be dealt with.

Air was the most critical problem. He had forty hours left to him before he suffocated. The shuttle was better off, particularly with only one man aboard. He had taken a careful sight on the shuttle as he came down; he could get to it, all right. That wasn't the problem.

The problem was getting inside.

MOOSE SCOTSBURY stood in the black shadow of a rock outcropping and looked at the shuttle ahead of him. It had taken him four hours to work his way to the ship, even though his bulky spacesuit was far more maneuverable in the low gravity than it had been on the *Ulysses*. He had not seen the ghost of a sign of life anywhere. There were only the brownish, brittle rocks, the bluish snow and ice, the orange and yellow ringed ball of Saturn—and the feeling of something watching with eyes that were not of Earth.

He stood behind the motionless shuttle and considered. The ship was blind in her tail, and there was no way his presence could be detected unless he chose to make his whereabouts known. He was unarmed and he did not dare to contact the shuttle by radio—another pair of lungs inside the ship would be about as welcome as the plague. It wasn't, all in all, a precisely Utopian situation.

As he saw it, he had only one chance. *He had to get inside that ship;* everything else was secondary. There was no way he could force the airlock open; there was, it was true, an emergency switch that would operate the outer door in case of an accident—operate it from the outside. But Scotsbury wasn't fool enough to believe he could get in without being spotted, and being sealed in an airlock was not a pleasant prospect.

If anyone else had been inside—

But that was wishful thinking, and wishful thinking had opened precious few doors that he knew of. Obviously, there was only one thing to do. He had to get the shuttle pilot *outside*. How?

The classic solutions to the problem emphatically wouldn't work. He couldn't starve him out, because the shuttle had all the food there was. He couldn't afford to wait anyhow—he had only thirty-six hours of air supply left to him, and once again the shuttle had the advantage. He couldn't wait for the pilot to come out of his own accord—why *should* he come out? It was a fact that the small shuttle did not have enough fuel to make it back to the closest base, on Mars, and that it would be possible to utilize the methane in Titan's atmosphere as an atomic fuel. If the pilot ever hoped to get away, he would have to come out with a converter. The question was, would he come out in time? That was a gamble that Scotsbury wasn't eager to take.

If a situation looks hopeless as it stands, a man can either give up or change the situation. Scotsbury was in no hurry to die. He had at least one good tool to work with—the radio. Unless he were greatly mistaken, the pilot would be feverishly trying to report back to the Martian base, to tell them what had happened.

That message must not get through.

If the ship were broadcasting, it would be possible to interfere with the aerial enough to cause serious disturbance. The pilot, unaware as he was of Scotsbury's presence, would have to come out to investigate. It was a sound, workable plan.

Confidently, Scotsbury switched on his tiny suit radio and adjusted the channel frequency. He listened intently,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then grimly, then aimlessly. He stood motionless in his clumsy spacesuit, staring at nothing. He began to feel the icy loneliness all around him.

The ship wasn't broadcasting.

SCOTSBURY waited; there was nothing else to do. He stood in the strange snow and listened to the faint static crackling in his earphones. The noise only accentuated the silence all around him. He breathed the oxygen that flowed steadily into his helmet and wondered what it felt like when air stopped coming.

He looked at Saturn. The patterns on the face of the planet had changed markedly since he had been on Titan, and they changed still more, very slowly, as he watched. The minutes ticked by and became hours.

Night was coming. . . .

Scotsbury thought about a lot of things, standing on a frozen world millions of miles from the Earth that was his home. He thought about women on soft summer nights. He thought of a golden sun washing a sandy beach with warmth. He thought about Sandoval and Stein and Heimer, and wondered if they had had time to think before it hit. . . .

He wondered about the people—he thought of them as people—who lived on Titan. Could he get to them, contact them? Undoubtedly, they would be listening, trying to pick up any radio waves. Unfortunately, his suit transmitter had an effective range of little more than a mile, and he, of course, had no idea where the people of this world might be. Then, too, the shuttle might pick up the message, which would be too bad.

It was night when he heard the quiet voice in his earphones.

"Hello, Mars. Hello Leystation. Can you hear me, Mars? Hello Mars. This is the ULYSSES *calling Mars. This is the* ULYSSES *calling Mars. Can you hear me, Mars? This is urgent. Top priority emergency message. Can you hear me, Mars? Top priority. . . ."*

Instantly, Scotsbury moved forward. He was stiff and tired from standing in one position for so long, but that didn't matter now. He walked out to the little shuttle, carefully skirting the tubes, and paused. There was plenty of light from Saturn, but the aerial was out of his reach. The ship had landed on her tail, of course, and the radio equipment was forward, or up, some twenty feet above his head. He could see the silver antenna clearly in the planet light.

Scotsbury took a deep breath and leaped for it. He missed the first time and landed ten yards beyond the ship. He came back, measured the distance more carefully, and leaped again, arms outstretched. This time he caught the metalloy antenna and hung on. Normally the aerial would not have supported his weight, but on Titan he weighed only thirty-four pounds. Carefully, he leaned forward until his own antenna touched that of the ship, and then he began to broadcast on the shuttle's frequency. He said nothing, but whistled steadily and monotonously into his helmet transmitter. That, he reflected grimly, should play the devil with a Radin Universal Unit.

Scotsbury kept it up for five minutes, and then he saw a gleam of yellow light below him as the airlock door began to hiss open. He released his hold on the antenna at once and fell lightly to the ground on the far side of the ship from the airlock. He stood in the black shadow cast by Saturn and he could feel his hands wet with sweat.

If this didn't work. . . .

He breathed again when the spacesuited figure above him climbed directly up to the antenna, his yellow suitlight stabbing ahead of him. There wasn't a sound, except what came through the earphones. Scotsbury didn't hesitate; it was now or never. He walked boldly out under the climbing figure, took careful aim, and leaped for the airlock door.

He made it, and a second later he was inside. He wasted no time looking back, but instantly tripped the release that closed the outer door. It hissed shut,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sealing him in. Scotsbury disengaged the emergency mechanism and waited until the airlock filled with air. Then he opened the inside door and stepped into the ship.

He smiled and sealed the airlock behind him.

HE TOOK his time getting out of his spacesuit and then stretched his legs with genuine pleasure. The air in the shuttle was no better than that from his suit tank, but there was more of it and it *felt* better. The shuttle cabin, small as it was, was luxury after the awkward restrictions of the suit.

He prowled around, checking on things, still in no hurry. He looked for a gun and failed to find one. He checked the air supply, and found enough for eight or nine days. He helped himself to some food concentrate and took a long drink of water. He sat down at the radio, still beamed for Mars, and listened: There was nothing.

He looked at his watch. He had been inside the ship for thirty minutes. He lit a cigarette, inhaled smoke luxuriously, and reset the radio for ship-to-suit. "Hello, Guthrie," he said pleasantly. "Having a wonderful time—wish you were here."

There was a long silence. Then Guthrie's voice came through the phones, "*Who's in there?* How did you get here? How did you know my name? For the love of heaven, man—"

"This is Scotsbury," Moose said conversationally. "A little bird—Snokapetl by name—told me you were out there. What in the world are you doing out there at this time of night? It's past your bed-time."

There was another pause. Then, "*Scotsbury.* Look, I was wrong, I admit that I was wrong. You've got to let me in! This is no time for jokes. They may be after me any minute. We're all alone here, Scotsbury, let bygones be bygones—"

"I never did like you, Guthrie," Scotsbury said.

"*You've got to let me in!*"

"Why?" asked Scotsbury, in a curious, we're-all-rational-men-here voice.

"I'd have let you in, Scotsbury. All you had to do was let me know you were here—"

Scotsbury laughed.

"You don't understand—we're all *alone* here!"

"That's right," agreed Scotsbury.

"Scotsbury, I beg you—I go down on my knees. . . ."

"You can skip the melodrama, Guthrie," Scotsbury said tiredly. "I'll let you in." He pressed a button. "The outer door is open. Walk in, close it behind you, let the air in, and take off your suit."

"You—you won't let the air out again—"

"Probably not," Scotsbury said, and waited.

"All set," came Guthrie's voice a minute later. "I won't forget this, Scotsbury, I'll do anything—"

"Are you unarmed?"

"Yes, of course. You don't think—"

Scotsbury walked to the airlock door and looked through the tiny duraglass port. Guthrie stood in the airlock chamber, very pale, holding his breath. He had taken off his suit and his hands were empty. Scotsbury smiled sourly and picked up a metalloy tamp rod some three feet long. He went back to the radio and said, "Come on in." He pressed the inner button and quickly stepped into position against the wall by the lock.

The door hissed open. For an instant nothing happened, and then Guthrie launched himself into the ship, whipping out a machine-action .38 as he came. He fired once at the chair in front of the radio before he realized that Scotsbury wasn't there, and then he twisted around like a cat.

Too late. Scotsbury whipped the tamp rod down on Guthrie's wrist, hard. Guthrie choked with pain and dropped the gun. Scotsbury picked it up, cold contempt in his eyes.

"Guthrie," he said slowly, "you're really one for the books."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IV

Down to Gehenna or up to the Throne,
He travels the fastest who travels alone.
Kipling, circa 1900.

THE two men faced ecah other across the narrow chamber. Scotsbury looked at the .38 in his hand and wondered. "How many men did you have to kill to get to the shuttle in time?" he asked into the silence. "Bob? Ralph? Toney? Sandy?"

Guthrie's gray eyes narrowed to slits. "You can't prove anything, Scotsbury," he said. "It would be my word against yours, and I assume that you jumped ship before it hit. That makes you a deserter."

Scotsbury laughed. "I'm not trying to prove anything, Drew," he said. "I'm satisfied."

Drew Guthrie sat down in the pilot's chair, keeping his hands carefully in front of him. He had himself under control now, and there wasn't a trace of fear in his eyes. "Go ahead and shoot me, Scotsbury," he said. "Let's get it over with."

"You agree that that's the only thing for me to do?"

"Of course. You have no choice. I'm ready."

Scotsbury nodded. Guthrie *was* ready; he wasn't bluffing. Incredibly, the man was still a hero to himself. If only, Scotsbury thought, life were a simple contest between the Good Guys and the Bad Guys, right and wrong. It was too bad that things weren't that simple. Scotsbury was aware that 'right' and 'wrong' were sometimes relative terms; he had never been *sure* of himself. Even granting the mouldy old dichotomy, it might well be that *he* was the 'Bad Guy.' Unquestionably, Guthrie had acted correctly according to his lights; you couldn't write him off as a fiend because he didn't happen to agree with you. No doubt he regarded you the same way.

"Why did you do it?" he asked, wanting to hear it.

Drew Guthrie smiled and lit his pipe —he had even managed to bring *that* along—looking for all the world like a one hundred percent tri-di hero. "Quite simple, really," he said. "It was the only practical thing to do. I'm afraid I don't share your romantic views about alien life, Scotsbury. I pride myself on being a practical man, even though it seems to be out of fashion. Take a look at history, Scotsbury. Men have been fighting men ever since there have *been* men; we have a lull now, it is true, but it won't last. War is the law of the universe, and whether you like it, or I like it, it is still a fact. If man can't adjust to other *men,* what makes you think he can live in peace with a powerful *alien* race?" He blew a thin stream of blue smoke across the cabin. "It was only a question of time before hostilities started, and I simply tried to get the jump on them. I lost, yes, but spare me your platitudes."

"And the men on the ship?"

Guthrie shrugged. "It was vital that this information got back to Earth, and with the reception around Saturn and Jupiter that won't be easy. It may take time. The more men there are on this ship, the less time we have. I feel that I acted in the best interests of my race; after all, *I* don't expect to get out of this alive myself."

"I see," said Scotsbury. "Did you get through to Leystation?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that."

"I don't suppose there's any point in asking whether or not you'd stick to your word and not interfere if I let you live."

Guthrie shrugged, his pipe clamped in his teeth. "You'd better shoot me, Scotsbury," he said. "I despise fools."

It was the height of irony, Scotsbury thought. Here they were, two human beings trapped on Titan, with an alien civilization watching. And with only two left, one wanted to kill the other! It was, to say the least, a sorry advertisement for *Homo sapiens,* although one would be hard put to say that it was not typical.

"I'm not going to kill you, Guthrie," Scotsbury said. "I don't think that's necessary." He put the .38 in his pocket.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Stand up."

"It's lucky for me that you're not smart," Guthrie said, rising.

"That's me, impractical," said Scotsbury evenly, and hit him solidly on the jaw. He caught him as he fell and deposited him on the floor. Then he sat down in front of the radio and went to work.

He had a message of his own to send, and he didn't want to be disturbed.

AN HOUR later Scotsbury said, "I know you're awake, Guthrie, so you might as well open your eyes."

The gray eyes opened. "I see you've tied my hands behind my back. Not scared are you. Scotsbury?"

Scotsbury, still perched on the chair, lit a cigarette and eyed the man on the floor. "Yes, I'm scared," he said. "I'm not underestimating you."

"How flattering."

Scotsbury blew a smoke ring at the low ceiling, and watched it wobble up uncertainly, then flatten itself out in a blue cloud when it made contact. "I'm going to give you a short lecture," he told the man on the floor. "You're not going to like it, and it'll bore you stiff. You won't get the point of it, either. But here's a small item to remember: *your life is going to depend on what I say.*"

"Spare me," Guthrie said, and managed to yawn.

Scotsbury looked at him with undisguised admiration. "I know I'm wasting my time," he said, "but then you've already pointed out that I'm a fool; you'll have to take the consequences. You think I hate you or something, but you're mistaken. I feel sorry for you, and here's why: you're the most impractical man I ever met."

Guthrie's gray eyes opened wide, but he said nothing.

"You're a brave man and a smart man, but you made the one big mistake of being born in the wrong century. Once upon a time, you would have been a big shot, and they'd have put a statue of you on horseback in the city square, where all the old women came to get water from the well. Once upon a time, you were just what the doctor ordered. It's too bad that times have changed. You're living in the past, Guthrie. You're an anachronism."

Guthrie's face was very white, but he kept it expressionless.

"When man left his own little planet and ventured into space, a new era started. Most everybody agreed that that was so, but they forgot the other side of the coin: the old era was finished. You'd find it pretty tough, Guthrie, to stop an H-bomb blast by sticking your finger in the dyke and closing your eyes, but that's what you're trying to do. You're trying to apply the solutions of 1724 to the problems of 2024, and all the while you're doing it you're ranting about being a practical man. It's a sad thing to watch."

"Thank you, Little Lord Fauntleroy," said Drew Guthrie with sarcasm.

Scotsbury shrugged. "I tried," he said.

Guthrie nodded toward the side viewport, and struggled to his feet. "If you're through playing Homely Philosopher, you might take a look at our friends outside."

Scotsbury started. Surely, Guthrie wouldn't be trying the oldest trick in the books. He kept a watch on the man with a corner of his eye and looked out the viewport.

It wasn't any trick.

THERE were a lot of them, and they were gathered on an outcropping of the brown rock that jutted out of the snow and ice. It was still night, but there was plenty of light to see by. It was difficult to tell, of course, but the things —Scotsbury found it hard to think of them as people—didn't look friendly.

"Go out and shake hands with them," Guthrie suggested. "Tell them all about brotherhood."

They weren't pretty, by Terran standards. They were dressed in voluminous garments of some metallic substance that gleamed whitely in the planetlight,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but you could see their outlines clearly enough. They had hands, with opposable thumbs, and they were bipeds with the normal number of heads and feet. Their skins were pale and seemed almost scaly. Oddly enough, they were hairless, which very neatly disposed of one long-accepted theory. They were tall, averaging about seven feet, and very thin. They carried weapons. They weren't utterly and completely alien, but rather looked like distorted, surrealistic human beings. The most fantastic thing about them wasn't visible—they were breathing hydrogen, ammonia and methane, and standing in a temperature of some two hundred and fifty degrees below zero.

Quite suddenly, Earth seemed very far away.

"Well?" asked Guthrie. "Let's have an up-to-date solution, friend. Or are we to affix saintly smiles to our faces and watch them fry us?"

Scotsbury hesitated. He was worried, and extremely unsure of his position. "They haven't done anything yet," he said slowly. "We know those—people—are intelligent; they appear to have developed a science and that proves that they're at least occasionally rational. What would happen if *they* had landed on Earth? Out on a farm, say? A bunch of farmers would gather 'round with their shotguns, to wait for the bigwigs to get there. They might attack, and they might not. But if the ship killed one of the farmers. . . ."

"They don't look like farmers to me," Guthrie said.

"I'll turn you loose if they attack," Scotsbury said. "We'll blast this crate up from here and do a little frying of our own."

They waited, watching the people of Titan. The people of Titan stood quite still, watching them. Scotsbury smiled slightly, realizing that he and Guthrie were the freaks on this world, instead of the other way around. He remembered, fleetingly, a scene he had seen once on a beach in Florida. An odd-looking creature had washed ashore with the tide, and five bathers had proceeded to beat it to a pulp with their oars. . . .

The people of Titan, whatever they were up to, seemed to be in no hurry. They stood without moving, studying the little ship from the *Ulysses*. It began to give Scotsbury the creeps, as though he were on a slide under a microscope. The smile on Guthrie's face didn't help any, either.

The hours crept by and daylight came again with a riot of orange and green and silver and blue. The people never moved, and Scotsbury noted without surprise that he had smoked two packs of cigarettes in the past five hours.

"What are you waiting for?" Guthrie asked finally, his voice thin and tired.

"The question is," Scotsbury told him, "what are *they* waiting for?"

Another hour slipped by, taking its own agonizingly slow time about it, before they had their answer. A dull gray vehicle, the first they had seen on Titan, pulled into view. It was globular in shape and it ran on belted wheels. It was rather large, perhaps twenty-five feet in diameter, and it promptly dominated the barren landscape. The people standing on the rock outcropping stirred uncertainly, and then, evidently acting on some sort of order, walked away by twos and threes and disappeared across the ice fields.

The gray globe took their place, waiting.

"Now what?" asked Guthrie.

"Now we go out and shake hands," Scotsbury said.

DREW GUTHRIE stared at him. If he had thought that Scotsbury were crazy before, his last doubts on the subject evaporated. "You're off your rocker," he said tightly.

"I don't even have a rocker," Scotsbury assured him. "My chair is bolted to the floor."

"That wasn't funny. If you think *I'm* going out there. . . ."

"Not at all," Scotsbury said. "You're staying here."

He shut Guthrie up by the simple process of not talking to him any more. He

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

took a length of wire from the chest and very carefully wired Guthrie's legs together. Then he climbed back into the unwieldy spacesuit that he had abandoned a few short hours before, and took enough oxygen for eight hours, which he figured would be all he needed. He pressed the button combination in the thick gloves and the suit motor whirred into action.

"Shoot me first," asked Drew Guthrie. "Don't leave me like this."

"I'll be back for you before your air gives out," Scotsbury said. "You'll be all right here. Remember—*I'll be back.*"

"You're mad," Guthrie said, his face very white.

Scotsbury shut out the voice by clamping his glassite faceplate shut. He shuffled into the airlock chamber and sealed the inner door behind him. He let the pressure equalize, opened the outer port, and stepped outside.

There was little or no change of temperature inside the suit, but Scotsbury shivered. He did not hesitate, but walked directly away from the shuttle through the blue-white snow. He walked straight toward the waiting gray globe, his pulse hammering in his throat.

There were no words to describe his mixed emotions. The short walk seemed to last forever. Fear and hope and regret drenched him with sweat. He was less sure about anything than he had ever been in his life, but he kept on walking. He walked evenly, step by step, neither hurrying nor hanging back. He wanted to get it over with.

When he reached the gray sphere, a port swung slowly open to take him inside.

V

"Come hither, Son," I heard Death say;
"I did not will a grave
Should end thy pilgrimage today,
But I, too, am a slave!"
Hardy, circa 1900.

SIX hours later, Scotsbury was safe in the Central Unit—there were no cities on Titan—and had exchanged his clumsy spacesuit for a thin plasticine sheath of Titan manufacture. He faced his Father earnestly, hardly conscious of the other scientists in the underground chamber.

"It's been a strange homecoming for you, my son," said his Father, speaking in Titanian. "I hope you can forgive us."

"The past is past," Scotsbury said in the same language, through the invisible filter in his hood. "I suppose none of us wanted it to turn out the way it has, but that doesn't change things any."

The tall, thin Father nodded in an oddly-Terran fashion. "You're right, of course, but I can't help wondering how you feel. . . ."

How do I feel? How does it feel to come home to a home you have never seen, a home you can't exist in without a protective suit? How does it feel to meet your Father, who has never laid eyes on you? How does it feel to be an alien among your own people?

He looked into his Father's violet eyes. "You made me," he said slowly. "You should know."

His Father looked away.

"I'm sorry I said that, Father. I don't blame you for what you did. The important thing now is not to waste me. Did the man's message get through to Mars?"

"I'm afraid that it did. We have had to make ready. . . ."

"Of course. But we are not beaten yet, Father. It will take time to organize an expedition from Earth. You've alerted the others there, and I'm still alive and kicking. If I can talk directly to the UN on Earth, we've got a good chance. You must not judge all of them by the man Guthrie—any more than they should judge you by your hasty, cowardly, and ill-advised destruction of the *Ulysses.*"

One of the scientists objected. "Here now, you can't—"

His Father waved him to silence. "He's right," he said. He turned to Scotsbury. "If I had been here, my son, it would not have happened. Don't be

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too harsh on your people; they have had cause enough to be afraid. But that, too, is past. We must not give up now. We have a beam to Earth ready for you." He placed a thin, pale hand on Scotsbury's shoulder, and Scotsbury felt the icy cold even through the plasticine. "Be eloquent, my son."

Scotsbury sat down in front of a vastly powerful communications instrument, and wished fervently for a cigarette. He breathed deeply. Never before, in all the history of the two peoples, he supposed, had so much depended on a single moment in time. Curiously enough, he felt singularly unheroic. He felt tired, he wanted a cigarette, and he thought irrationally that he might never smoke one again.

"Go ahead," said his Father.

"Hello, Earth. Hello, United Nations Radio and the peoples of Earth. This is a top priority emergency message to all the peoples of Earth. Can you hear me, Stan? Get this on wire and keep broadcasting it. Hello, Earth."

Scotsbury gave them five minutes, and then he leaned forward toward the square microphone, as though by doing so he could somehow bring himself closer to the world of his birth. He *had* to make them see.

"Hello, Earth. This is Earl Scotsbury, hydroponic engineer, survivor of the spaceship *Ulysses*. Repeat: This is Earl Scotsbury, survivor of the spaceship *Ulysses*. By now your newspapers and tri-dis will be filled with a sensational report of what happened to our ship, and you will be fearing for your lives.

"This is the true story: there is nothing to fear.

"I am speaking to you from the world of Titan, and you are now but a faint star in the sky to me, even as I am to you. I have made contact with human beings here on Titan, and their leaders will speak to you in a moment. They are not monsters, as you have been led to believe. They are only people, no better and no worse than are we ourselves.

"Here is the story of what has happened, and it is a strange story. . . ."

A STRANGE STORY, yes, Earl Scotsbury thought. But one not half so strange as the true one. . . .

Life on Titan was considerably older than life on the Earth, and intelligent life-forms of a type roughly similar to 'human beings' had appeared at a correspondingly earlier date. This, of course, was to be expected, since conditions on Titan were 'normal' for the solar system. All the great planets of the system—Saturn, Uranus, Jupiter, and Neptune—had similar atmospheres of hydrogen, methane, and ammonia. After the initial 'cooling period' they were all very cold, and liquid methane took the place of water. Actually, the Earth was something of a curiosity, and for many millenniums it had been doubted whether or not life could exist there at all.

The course of evolution on the great planets had been completely different from that of Earth, although it had involved the standard change from liquid to atmospheric forms, with various intermediate stages along the way. It had been an extremely complex development, involving all the major planets, and its end product had been intelligent life-forms adapted to the smaller worlds of Titan, Ganymede, Callisto, and Europa.

Some one million years ago, these people had evolved a technology capable of carrying them through space, and they had explored their solar system. They had visited the Earth, then just emerging from the Pliocene, and had found it to be a markedly unwholesome place, with incredible, unnatural hothouse effects that spawned a multitude of monstrosities that crawled, climbed, slithered, and flew with mindless ferocity and waste. They had noted a good many bipedal anthropoid forms—the preceding Miocene having been the great age of apes—but had not noticed, or had not grasped, the significance of certain transitional forms akin to Pithecanthropus that were even then beginning to dot the hellish landscape. The things looked like grotesque travesties of themselves, and one of their scientists had gone so far as to suggest that perhaps they might

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be developing into something like intelligent beings but this idea had been conclusively proved impossible in the journals, and the scientist had lived out his life in disgrace.

The people had, in fact, found the Moon much more to their liking, and were unable to explain why it hadn't produced any life to speak of. They had kept an observatory on the Moon for a few centuries, looking down at the diseased hyper-jungle out of which more and more *things* burst forth and crashed mindlessly along with remarkable singleness of purpose. The Earth was something of the wonder spot of the system, and it inspired countless horror stories about hairy monsters that invaded the civilized planets.

A million years bring many changes. The satellite peoples were quite different in their mental patterns from anything that was to appear on Earth, and they naturally proceeded in their own ways. It was merely a coincidence that they had taken a fling at space travel—virtually an inevitability for any intelligent beings—and their motives had been utterly different from any that had later prompted the men from Earth. They had abandoned it after they had gotten such information as they wished, and the notion of reaching the stars had never occurred to them; they weren't interested.

Mere numbers did not appeal to them, and their population declined quantitatively. They never built any cities and warfare was unknown. They did not spend their time contemplating the Ultimate Reality, of course—that was an Earthly concept. From the point of view of a Terran, they stagnated, which simply meant that they did not engage in any of the activities which Terrans had pronounced worth while. As a matter of fact, they were primarily concerned with something called Norancrux, which had no Earthly parallel at all.

They went their own way, and thought about Earth even less than the people of Earth thought about Titan. They still kept a few observatories going, but the question of life on other worlds had ceased to be of interest to them.

Therefore, what happened on July 16th, 1945, came as an unpleasant shock to the people of Titan.

WHEN the first atomic bomb ripped the air of Alamogordo, New Mexico, and was detected by instruments far out in space, the immediate reaction of the system's civilized peoples was one of utter incredulity. How *could* that sun-blasted planet have produced intelligent life and nuclear fission within a scant million years?

The second reaction was one of fear. What were the things down there like? What could be expected of them when they got into space with their vast new powers? *What if they were already in space?*

As soon as possible, spaceships were reconditioned and defenses set up. The first expedition was sent to the Moon to eradicate what few traces of their earlier visits still remained. The second was sent to Earth.

It was obvious that they had to learn all they could about life on Earth, and do it quickly. It soon became evident that they could find out little of real import simply by cruising over the landscape and watching, although they saw enough to increase their jitters substantially. They could not *land* on that furnace-like planet—and yet they had to have information before they could know how to proceed.

The people of Titan were simply older than those of Earth, older and different. They weren't necessarily "better' or 'worse'—two terms that meant little or nothing when interpolated between two value systems. They were more 'advanced' in some ways, less so in others. Mostly, they were just concerned with entirely different things. There were plenty of people, and not all of them irresponsible hot-heads, who advocated wiping out the planet posthaste, but they were narrowly overruled by a more objective scientific group, which refused to proceed in ignorance.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If you want to find out the truth about another people, you send observers into his country. If you really wish to understand another culture, you go and live in it. For best results, it is not wise to send a three-headed monster to do your interviewing, either.

It was obvious that they had to counterfeit the dominant Terran life-form, which was similar enough to themselves to be at least comprehensible. The big question was, *how?* It was all very well to talk about synthetic men and physical chameleons, but they were quite useless, even if they could be developed. They might be able to devise something that *looked* like an Earth form, but not something that *acted* like one. In order to build directives into a machine, you must know what the directives *are*. And if the things themselves didn't know . . .

The solution, once it was devised, was simplicity itself. If you want to get an absolutely foolproof version of a hundred dollar bill, there is a way: run it off on the government printing press. If you want to get an obsolutely foolproof version of a human being—

EARL SCOTSBURY had been born—in 1979—in the accepted manner, and his parents had been thoroughly normal human beings. That, in fact, is why they had been selected.

It was not, of course, that he was *the same as* other human children. The medical science of Titan was highly developed, as it had to be in a small society, and they altered the Scotsbury embryo slightly by controlled radiation. To be precise, the neural groove in the back of the embryo was first treated very carefully, and then when the groove folded and the head end swelled into the three primary brain structures, it was treated again. The differences in the growing foetus were not great—but they were effective.

What happened, in essence, was that the child came into the world with some highly selected, built-in responses, which were closely akin in their function to strong post-hypnotic suggestions. When the man became mature, at eighteen years, he was provided with instruments and put into contact with others. Through the instruments, he was educated. Naturally, he didn't resist or question the education—he hadn't been made that way.

Scotsbury was a free agent, within limits. He was apprised of the facts, and in his turn he reported on the cultures of Earth. His function was primarily that of an observer—which was a mistake. The people of Titan, still underestimating the terrestrial life-forms, had thought it beyond possibility that they could have developed space travel in a single generation, after it had been established that they had only atmosphere rockets in 1945. Earl Scotsbury had been designed as an observer, not a manipulator.

Scotsbury's 'Father' had been the man on Titan who had been his teacher. Scotsbury had accepted the situation without rancor—as he had been designed to do—but there were many other considerations to take into account. Just as it makes little practical difference to an individual in everyday life whether he was created according to a divine plan or just happened, Scotsbury still had a life to live.

Earl Scotsbury was a human being, no matter what else he was. He grew up with the experiences, habits, values and dreams of a human being. He laughed and loved, made mistakes, ate hamburgers at the Huts. He was neither a pathological fiend tiresomely intent on destroying his fellow men nor a disembodied intellect fighting for Justice. He had fun and did what he could, and in many ways he was closer to the 'ideal' human being than many unaltered specimens.

At any rate, Moose Scotsbury liked to think so.

He could see the faults and the virtues of both Earth and Titan, although he was partial to Earth because his friends were of Earth. He had needed no prodding to spend his life in space—that was what he wanted to do, being what he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was. He had done his level best on the *Ulysses* to foul up the computer long enough to enable Titan to escape detection, because he had known that Guthrie would lead his people into destruction.

there has been a misunderstanding. Both sides were at fault, and no one is attempting to minimize the loss of life that has occurred. The people of Titan are willing and eager to try again. *There*

GUIDE TO THE BEST CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION

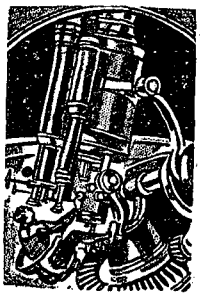
THE VIRGIN OF ZESH

A Rollicking Novel

By L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

in February

THRILLING WONDER STORIES



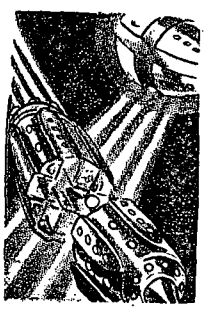
THE BIG JUMP

An Interstellar Novel

By LEIGH BRACKETT

in February

SPACE STORIES



Bradbury
Heinlein
Kuttner
Asimov
Williamson

All in the 1953

WONDER STORY ANNUAL

Brackett
Kuttner
De Camp
Jacobi
Gold

in the January

FANTASTIC STORY MAGAZINE

Neither Titan nor Earth was ready for contact, but the contact had come. Moose Scotsbury did what men have always done.

He did his best. . . .

"That is the true story, my friends," Scotsbury concluded his message to Earth—and so it was, except for the omitted part about the biological engineering. "We have made the first contact with another race on Titan, and *is no need for further bloodshed.* They are willing to co-operate in every way possible. They have agreed to release me and transport me to any ship from Earth that comes here, so that you may see for yourself that I am speaking of my own free will.

"I do not need to tell you of the significance of this moment. The people of Titan, no better than you are, have managed to rise to the occasion.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Can Earth do less?

"This is Earl Scotsbury, hydroponic engineer, survivor of the spaceship *Ulysses*. The next voice you hear will be that of the Authority of Titan, speaking to you in English."

Scotsbury surrendered the transmitter to the man in question and got to his feet. He was tired, and his legs ached. His Father nodded approval, but Scotsbury was not so sure. It had been good, yes. But had it been good enough?

A man burst into the chamber even while the Authority was talking. He moved very fast for a Titan, and he was clearly agitated. Scotsbury and his Father turned to look at him.

"The Terran on the shuttle!" he exclaimed. "He's freed himself and is bringing the ship in for an attack!"

His Father stared at the messenger.

"I know," Earl Scotsbury said wearily. "I tied Guthrie so he would be able to get loose."

VI

I walked down to the shore of tomorrow
And listenend to the lost yesterdays . . .
Vargas, circa 2000.

SCOTSBURY walked into an adjoining chamber to watch on the viewer. He felt about halfway between an exultant I-told-you-so attitude and a nameless sadness. The shuttle was clearly visible on the screen, flaming along at full acceleration just high enough to clear the low rock mountains of Titan.

Guthrie had, of course, worked himself free and turned on the radio, as Scotsbury had intended. He had heard Scotsbury's broadcast, and from that it was but a simple triangulation problem to get the position of the Central Unit. The shuttle was unarmed, but it did have one weapon: itself. It could hurl its atomic power plant at the Unit and make them know they had been stung.

It would kill the pilot, naturally.

Scotsbury had hoped that Guthrie would remember what he had told him; he had even said specifically that Guthrie's life would depend on what he said. Evidently, he had wasted his breath.

The shuttle came on, terribly, mindlessly. Scotsbury watched it with grim fascination. He could imagine Guthrie's thin face as he piloted the ship. He could see his cold gray eyes as they looked down upon the blue-white snows that would be the last thing they ever saw. He saw the firm hand on the controls, steady even now. . . .

The blue flash came when the ship was still miles away from the Central Unit, and the ship ceased to exist.

Scotsbury raised his hand in a farewell salute. If courage were all it took, then Drew Guthrie had certainly had more than his share. He had murdered four of Scotsbury's best friends, tried to murder him, and had ended his life in a last try to live up to the only code he knew. "That's that," Scotsbury said.

He walked back past the central chamber where the Authority was still broadcasting his message of hope to the Earth, and he kept on going until he was outside. The plasticine suit was effective enough even in the snow and ice, and Scotsbury wanted to be alone.

He didn't belong here, he knew that. This world was not his world, no matter what had happened at his birth. By electing to stay on Titan for now, instead of accepting their offer to take him back to Earth, he had expressed his faith in his fellow men. If they came for war, they would be destroyed by a technology that had forgotten a million years more than Earth had ever learned. If that happened, Scotsbury could never get back.

He wanted only one thing: he wanted to go home.

Night had come again, and Scotsbury looked up at a faint star that burned in the sky. He thought of the meaningless arc of the shuttle that had ended in a flash of destruction. He thought of the people he had known, laughing, crying, hoping. He thought of green hills and clean blue skies. He thought of Helen.

Moose Scotsbury smiled into the night, confident in the choice he had made. He smiled and began the long watch, waiting. . . .

Waiting for the ships from Earth.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By
CHARLES F. KSANDA

STEPPING STONE

Other voices, other planets, were the things that would haunt him

AT SUNSET the desert was like a vast cathedral. The wind that sizzled through the day had hushed, and even the voice over the public address system, grandiose though the words were, seemed small and lost in the silence.

"Mankind must go forward or it must go backward," the voice intoned sonorously, "it cannot for long stand still."

Stanford stood before the Head of the Commission as he spoke, not hearing the words, only their echo rolling off into the waste land. At his back the rocket was a slender steel spire pointing at heaven.

"There are those who say we are going backward," said the Head of the Commission to the small and solemn crowd gathered in the desert, "who say that we

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are flinging ourselves back to the dawn of civilization and perhaps beyond—to extinction. I know—as we all know in our hearts—that this is not so. The Science that unlocked the fearful core of the atom has also given us the glorious key to the stars."

The sun moved swiftly in the desert, and, as though suddenly apprehensive, the shadow of the rocket moved away from it. It engulfed the speaker's platform, and Stanford watched it from the bottoms of his eyes, shrink across the pale dusty earth. The shadow of a fragile thing really, the M17—sleek on the outside, stuffed on the inside with engines and fuel and machinery with barely room left for a man: an overgrown can.

Perhaps, on his final week of leave, he should have stayed in New York. Perhaps, thought Stanford, I should have stayed in bed. With Eloise. He had had the notion of marrying her, had thought better of it, perhaps through noble instinct, and he had returned to the desert with nothing more than an insistent ache between the eyes, result of too much farewell party.

Now a nerve in his leg was beginning to twitch, and he wished that the Head of the Commission would get done with his speech. Sixteen rockets had gone to Mars ahead of him. Sixteen rockets had landed safely on Mars; the signals had been clearly seen. Sixteen rockets had not come back. This was no time to make a man stand in the desert like a ramrod.

Stanford was number seventeen, M17.

"M17," said the Head of the Commission, "seventeenth manned rocket to leave the desert of Nevada for the desert of Mars. Mankind during these days of crisis is like a spring winding itself tighter and tighter, storing its energy for some immense task which it has been unable to find. If this energy is not released, it may destroy itself in those atomic wars which some men with little vision and much fear have foreseen. There is only one way for us to go forward. And that is up."

He pointed boldly toward the purple sky. When he spoke again, his voice rose in a tremulous crescendo.

"There is our task. The stars are our task, and Mars is the stepping stone which will lead us there. There will be an M18 and an M19; there will be rockets until Mars is ours!"

The voice thundered into silence. It rumbled away to the west, and east and north and south. The crowd surged forward. The Head of the Commission turned to face Stanford, and flash bulbs hissed like miniature lightnings in the desert. Stanford's face showed nothing, or perhaps it was grim determination.

He shook the hand of the Head of the Commission, and wondered why he had come at all to make this trip. He saluted smartly and strode to the base of the rocket. He climbed the long ladder as swiftly and with as much dignity as possible. At the entrance hatch he turned for a moment and faced the crowd.

Perhaps he should have stayed in New York. He faced Eloise, two thousand miles away, through a television screen, but his face showed nothing. He was a military man, a hero of the hour, and mankind awaited his safe return.

The door ground shut behind him. It clicked; it hissed. It sealed itself against the outer spaces; it tested itself; then, satisfied, it turned on a green light.

Stanford crawled into the shock hamper. For a moment it was very quiet, and he was utterly alone in the can with the machinery and the fuel and the engines. Mankind awaited his safe return—but would he return to find mankind safe? Then a click and a chatter: a relay set twenty-two hundred electron tubes about their tasks. On the board above him lights winked red and amber, then green. There was nothing for a man to do but lie back and watch the earth dwindle and later perhaps amuse himself with the Hollywood films in the microfilm library.

Stanford lay waiting. Perhaps he should have stayed home and fought an atom war. But it was too late; the jets rumbled about him like all the uranium and plutonium and hydrogen bombs in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the world, exploding together.

Three weeks later he landed on Mars. . . .

THEY were wrong, the text books, the science writers, the scientists themselves. There were no vast deserts, no eroded red rock, no canals. He climbed down the long ladder to a green plateau. It might have been a farmer's meadow, almost the fairway of a suburban country club.

Stanford rolled the signal rocket across the grass, some distance from the ship, set its firing switch, and lay behind a sheltering ridge. In a moment the rocket whooshed into the air, in another its warhead had burst like the Fourth of July. With his eyes closed, shielded by his arm, Stanford saw its brilliance. Presently they would see it through the telescopes back home, and they would know that the seventeenth rocket had made the journey safely.

Stanford stood up and breathed the air. It was cold and thin and like wine. He checked the homing device; its two dials showed him the direction of the rocket and its exact distance away from him. Then he set off toward the east. Not ten miles away was a city, a large white city; he had seen it immediately before landing.

He strolled for some time pleasantly through the grass; it was green and springy beneath his feet, and he had pleasant thoughts about Mars. Dillon and Hendricks — M16 and M13 — his friends, they had probably come this way too. They were probably waiting in the city ahead. Ah, the city! Stanford remembered the brief glimpse of it seen through the instrument lights flashing red and yellow and green during the landing—it was a fairy city, an Arabian Nights city, a Martian paradise.

A strange sight, Stanford, striding more swiftly now across the too-silent meadow, singing a lusty song he and Dillon and Hendricks had sung one night in a bar, when they had been learning to fly the M boats. Hendricks—M13, the bad luck number—there was one hell of a guy. He would be waiting at the gates of the city with the key in one hand and a blonde in the other, the mayor kneeling at his feet. That was the kind of a guy Hendricks was.

Stanford came to a halt and sank to the grass, his chest one knife-stabbing pain. The air, he thought, is intoxicating, and somewhat too thin. He breathed through his respirator, regretfully watching the gossamer vision of Hendricks at the gates of the city vanish into the limbo of all dreams.

WHEN he started off again for the edge of the plateau, which almost incredibly now was quite close, he walked more slowly. Resting in the grass he had become aware for the first time of the quiet of this world. There was not even a wind, and the grass itself had felt less than springy under his hands; it was cobwebby stuff, only slightly more real than Hendricks had been.

An hour's walking brought him to the rim of the plateau, and another to the bottom of its steep slope. Before him now, between him and the city, was a riotous wall of foliage. He traveled for some while along its edge, searching vainly for some other one-word to describe it, but there was none. It was a jungle.

So *this* was Mars!

A frown crossed his face as he stood uncertainly before what was either a trail or a natural lack of undergrowth. His reluctance to enter the jungle finally gave way to the logic that following his present course between the plateau's slope and the jungle's edge could only take him indefinitely farther from his goal, which certainly was the city, the white beautiful city.

Thinking of it sustained him for a time in the tranquil gloom. The trail was not difficult to follow, and presently he found himself regarding the foliage with a kind of nature walker's curiosity. Rhubarb stalks as thick as a house, dripping lacy silver fern fronds two hundred feet above his head; fat green leaves with red veins that might have been blood, and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

uncanny stalks that could have been eyes, standing in a circle; saucer flowers of translucent amber on leafless stems, their centers pulsating to some slow vegetable rhythm; a thousand things never seen by the eye of man.

Or had they been?

For a moment he was convinced that he had seen all of it before, but such convictions are not uncommon, and this one was absurd. Nevertheless, he remained vaguely troubled until he saw sunlight once again ahead, and even though the clearing turned out to be a swamp, he was glad to be out of the jungle.

The trail continued across the swamp, and although all around him there seemed to be a kind of sinuous movement, Stanford could see no definite menace until behind him the jungle exploded. Directly along the trail charged a bluish colored thing with a body like a giant wine cask, from the end of which protruded a single horny spike. Fire snorted from the thing, and steam, and the thumping of its hooves shook the ground.

Stanford threw himself from the trail, into the writhing rushes and fronds, and felt the oozing swamp pull him downward into itself, but it was too late to hide. The beast obviously had seen him, for its red eyes were on his own, and before them was the spike and around them the fire and steam.

Stanford carried a gun, but in his hand it felt small and useless. A toy, he thought, pulling the trigger with a kind of sinking dread, a thing for kids to play with.

Six shots rang out. From somewhere far away there was a faint echo of the last. Then Mars was silent. Stanford clung to the solid edge of the trail, waiting, then slowly pulled himself out of the mud. A puff of brown smoke was drifting away from the point where the thing had been.

There was nothing else at all.

BEYOND the far side of the swamp was a grassy knoll. From the top of it Stanford was barely able to see the tallest towers of the city. He sat in the grass, breathing once again through the respirator. He checked the indicator on his wrist. The rocket lay slightly south of west and nearly seven miles away. That meant that the city should be within three or four miles, and from what he could see there was only open rolling meadowland ahead. He should reach the city in not much more than an hour.

Stanford thought these things very deliberately. He had noticed that his breathing was still far too rapid, and he had noticed too, looking at the homing device, that his hand was trembling—slightly, but without control. That thing, the fire-snorting steaming thing—he had seen it before. All that had happened had happened before.

Stanford sprang to his feet and began walking steadily in the direction of the city.

It had happened, but not to him. The M17, the lonely cramped boring weeks in space, and the microfilms. He hadn't even watched this one all the way through. It was one of the first three-dimensionals, probably produced in some Hollywood back lot about the same time Larson and Shoenburg reached the moon. That would make it nearly twenty years old, and a stinker on a colossal scale. The same jungle—the rhubarb stalks probably really rhubarb, a miniature devised by some clever technician—all of it, the same lumbering locomotive torso belching fire and smoke, headed directly for the camera lens, only there had been besides the man, of course, a beautiful girl.

It had happened, all right. Except that in the film the planet was Venus and not Mars. And it had happened not to Stanford but to some actor whose name had long since been forgotten. . . .

He came to the city in mid afternoon. It was a large city, a white city of skyscrapers, its skyline not unlike Manhattan's, but Hendricks was not at its gates. It had no gates. The streets at this side of the city ended cleanly at the edge of the meadow, and nowhere beyond them could Stanford see any evidence of a country road. The city might have been

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chopped off carefully, someplace else, and placed here to rest on the green grass, except that it was no miniature, and Stanford could conceive of no knife large enough to do the chopping.

The street he entered looked like all the others, a dark rectangular chasm between the tall white buildings. At this end it was deserted, although a block or two ahead Stanford could see traffic pass. So far as he could tell, the traffic was the ordinary traffic of any city, back on Earth, sixty million or more miles away, and the street itself was ordinary, almost familiar, with the impersonal familiarity of many city streets.

Without breaking his stride, Stanford read the signs on the store fronts. ACME DRY CLEANING, SAME DAY SERVICE. MUELLER'S BAKERY, *Oven Fresh Bread and Rolls.* JOE'S GRILLE. Signs of a thousand cities sixty million miles away; and at the corner, DRUGS, SODA, COSMETICS.

The intersection was deserted, and he continued straight ahead, feeling himself reel a little, unable to turn, like a drunken man, plummeting forward faster and faster to keep from falling. At the next corner he caught himself against a lamp post. The air, he remembered, is thin and a little intoxicating.

He would have to take it easy.

Leaning slightly against the lamp post, his fingers touching the cold metal, he waited automatically for a red light. Across from him, Hendricks strolled along the cross street with a blonde on his arm. Stanford leaned back against the post, closed his eyes, and deliberately forced himself to breathe deeply, ten times.

When he opened his eyes, Hendricks and the girl were gone, and the light was green. On the opposite corner was a sign HAPPY VALLEY . . . *Beer, Wine, and Mixed Drinks.*

Stanford sat at the empty bar and asked for bourbon.

"Water-soda?" asked the bartender.

"Soda," Stanford said.

What else could he say? Did you say, "Look here, I'm from Earth, I've come across sixty million miles of empty space in a tin can, and I want some kind of reception?" And then did they order out a brass band and dancing girls and the mayor, and heave ticker tape at you from the windows? Looking at the bartender, Stanford doubted it. He would say, "Yeah, that's swell," or if you were persistent he would refuse to sell you another drink, or maybe even call a cop.

"Nice day," Stanford said.

"Be cold tonight," the bartender said, retiring to the far end of the bar.

HE BEGAN wiping glasses, and to Stanford he looked like a thousand other bartenders. Could you try a casual approach, something like, "Say, by the way, what's the date?" And he would say the sixteenth, and that would be that. You just couldn't ask, the sixteenth of *what?* Better to grab him by the shoulders and shout, "Look here, is this place Mars, or isn't it?" Then he would be sure not to sell you another drink.

Sell you . . . Stanford's hand went toward his pocket and came away empty. It had not occurred to him to bring along money to use on Mars. But how long could he exist in a city like this without money, and what kind of money should he have brought? Casually, he got up from the stool and strode toward a juke box near the doorway. He looked at the titles; they were old, a year or two or more, but most of them were familiar. From the corner of his eye he watched until the bartender bent down to place the glasses on a shelf. Then he slipped through the door and ran down the street.

He did not stop until he had turned two corners, one to the right, one to the left, and gone halfway up the block. Then he paused long enough to look behind him. Apparently he had not been followed. He slowed to a walk now, looking much like any other man, or Martian, strolling through the city's streets, except that his chest was full of fire, and the force of his breathing shook his insides.

Across the street, walking in his direc-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion, were two men. Stanford looked at them hard for a time, and then crossed the street diagonally.

"Dillon," he said in a conversational tone. "Dillon," a little louder. "Hendricks!"

The men glanced at him casually and continued on their way.

Stanford sat down on the steps of a building until his breathing was nearly normal, and when he started into the city again he walked in a tunnel of his own making. Somewhere was an end to this journey, and at the end would be a great white beacon of truth. Or a madhouse.

He drifted along a busy thoroughfare. The afternoon was fading into early evening; gradually all the mingled sounds and the movement and the subdued light blended into a sort of tranquility around him. He let himself become aware of his surroundings again, of the store windows, and the street signs, finally of the people.

The trouble was that they were all too familiar, even the green buses with the flat glass fronts. There was nothing but his memory to tell him he had ever left Earth, nothing about the city that was different from any other city. In fact, it reminded him in some ways of all the cities he had ever been in.

He had had enough of the thoroughfare, and he began to walk too fast again, through narrower side streets where lights were beginning to glow, until he came upon a large open square surrounded by giant buildings that rose like cliffs into the twilight. The center of the square was sunken, with a stone railing around it, and people were idly peering downward.

Stanford leaned on the railing, hearing the sounds of the "Skater's Waltz." Below him people were skating on ice, a few men, a young boy, and girls in very short skirts, twirling prettily about with the music, and he remembered. . . .

How long ago was it, how far away? The last week with Eloise, and the evening they had wandered, without plan, through Rockefeller Plaza, pausing at this very spot. . . .

He grasped hard at the stone railing, but it crumbled in his fingers. The ground, too, was beginning to sag. Around him the faces seemed to bob in time with the waltz. Stanford looked at them, but they were looking at the skaters, or they were looking idly upward at the buildings, or they were talking quietly together.

Familiar faces: Dillon, Hendricks, other men he had known and forgotten, and girls too . . . beyond them, familiar buildings . . . something was wrong with one of the buildings. On three sides of the square they were all right, but on the fourth—

Then a perfume as familiar as his name, a wisp of red hair against his cheek. He turned his head, but she had drawn hers back, and for an instant he saw beyond her, to the fourth side of the square.

There was no mistaking the building. It was the United States Capitol, complete with dome and the Statue of Freedom on top. Then her face was in front of his, grinning.

"Hi, Stan."

Stanford was never sure what he did in that moment. He might have screamed. Or he might have made no sound at all.

"ACCLIMATIZE," Hendricks said, "you've got to acclimatize, that's all." He peered down cheerfully from where he sat beside Stanford's bed. "Different air, different gravity," he gestured negligently with a cigarette, "takes a little time. You know."

Stanford propped himself on the pillow. He did not quite recall getting to the hotel, but somehow Hendricks had been there, steadying his arm, making the arrangements at the desk, leading him to the elevator.

"Tell me about this, about Mars."

Hendricks would tell him, Hendricks was a hell of a guy, and it would all be very simple.

"Later. For right now, get some sleep. Here." Hendricks produced a white pill, and from a pitcher beside the bed poured

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a glass of water. Stanford took the pill obediently; he was tired. And, he realized as he drank the water, he was enormously thirsty. He drank another glass; yet it did not quench his thirst.

He lay back, feeling the heaviness of his eyes, the softness of the bed, like a bed of clouds, and then he began to remember.

"Later," he said suddenly, "is not soon enough." He kicked off the covers, and stood uncertainly for a moment, thinking Hendricks was gone.

"There'll be time, time enough later."

Hendricks was at the door, and Stanford lurched toward him. His words seemed to fall singly from his lips and bounce to the floor like little rubber balls.

"Something here is not quite as it should be."

He clutched Hendricks' shoulder, and his hand went *through* his shoulder. He had been counting on Hendricks for support, and now he fell queerly against the wall. The wall felt rubbery.

Hendricks looked almost sad, biting his lip. Silently, he helped Stanford back to the bed, and before his head had hit the pillow, Stanford was asleep.

Sometime in the night he awakened. Or he might have dreamed he had awakened; it was no longer easy to distinguish reality from unreality. Mars was silent and Mars was cold. He flicked shut the pores of his plastic clothing and, almost perfectly insulated, waited for the enclosed heat of his body to warm him.

Above him were the stars, unwinking, fiercely bright, and cold. Beneath him was sand. He let it trickle through his fingers. The soft warm bed was gone, and the hotel that contained it, and the gleaming white city. There was no city at all, there was only sand, glittering here and there in the light of the particularly bright star which might have been one of the moons, and here and there stood stunted spiky things which might have been plants growing in the sand.

The faintest of sounds trickled through the silence, and he saw that it was water. Not far off it glistened in the starlight, a silver thread no bigger than a man's arm.

Warmer now, he lay back on the sand, looking upward for a long while at the stars, until they seemed to come down upon him, to pass through him, and at the same time remain as remote as ever. And he had another dream, or perhaps it was not a dream.

IT STARTED with what seemed his own thought, the words, "Mars goes to bed early," although he could not think why he had thought them. Then he realized that a voice had said them, and he relinquished himself to the voice, as one does to the actors in a dream.

"You think you are dreaming. Then think, what is a dream?" The voice was more an echo, and the silence left behind when it paused was immense. "A recollection of the past, a fragment from here, another from there, one from this time and one from that. And perhaps too an apprehension of the future. Bits and snatches put together strangely, and something else, something vital—the dreamer who creates the dream and at the same time watches and believes that it is real. He is three things separately: producer, actor, spectator. Think about dreams, and you will understand Mars. Dreams are like a play, but where is the stage?"

Mars was silent and it was cold. The silver thread of water trickled through the silence. Stanford remembered that he was still thirsty, but he did not go to the water. Instead, despite the protection of his clothing, he lay on the sand and shivered.

"Somewhere must be a place where the producer arranges the sets, where the actors speak their lines, so that that part of the dreamer who is spectator can watch and listen. When you dream, there are delicate vibrations around you which can be measured with delicate instruments, and if one knew how to read the instruments he could watch your dream. The producer may create with changes in electric and magnetic fields; they are the stuff of the stage and the actors. But we do not all dream the same way."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Under Stanford was the desert, above him were the stars. Between them was only silence and cold. *This* was Mars. Sand, stars, a cactus plant.

"Up there, very white and very distant, is a star. And there are planets, one of them my home. Think of such a star—another kind of matter—a grain of dust from my world would crush your hand. Think of living things made from such substance—you have heard of it—and you may understand that I dream a different kind of dream. To you it is a very substantial dream, but I could pass a hand through you, if I had a hand, and not know you were there.

"Do you begin to understand?"

Stanford's memory returned to the rocket, to the greensward of springy grass that had turned to cobwebby stuff in his fingers, to the jungle that should have been on Venus or in Hollywood, to the fire beast that had vanished in a puff of smoke, finally to the city. The too-familiar streets, the familiar faces with no recognition in their eyes, the skaters and the waltz and—

"Flaws. My dreams are filled with them. I grow tired—I forget—yet they are pleasant dreams." The voice now seemed to Stanford weary and sad. "I am injured, and I must have periods of rest; for these I have chosen the night time. That is why Mars goes to bed early."

In the east, a faint pearly glow rolled upward from the horizon, like silk cast over the stars. Stanford rose and walked slowly to the water. It must be nearly sunrise; in this thin air there could be little dawn. He lay on his stomach and touched his lips to the water; it was cold but it was also refreshingly wet. He remembered the water Hendricks had given him that had not quite been water, and then remembered his hand going through Hendricks' shoulder.

HENDRICKS is many people now. Mars is a large world, and Hendricks is elsewhere, with his thoughts and his memories all about him, and now his life will be enriched wth your thoughts and memories. The others too—there are other cities; I can dream many dreams at a time.

"You cannot comprehend my loneliness, how grateful I am to all of you. This world around me has been my tomb for a hundred thousand years. My memories, my apprehensions, every possible variation was dreamed away long ago. Now I have yours."

Stanford felt the loneliness, as though it were his own. For a moment he was elsewhere, deep in the hot dark liquid core of the planet: a gigantic labyrinth of a brain, tunnels of memory and creation and dream-spinning, awakening now, bringing the cities to life, moving the arms and legs and thoughts of many men who looked like Hendricks and Dillon and many many others, and through it all ran the thread of pain from an ancient wound never healed.

"There were two of us, traveling outside of space. For a thousand years I pursued him. Gradually, I began to gain. He thought to throw me off by returning to the normal universe, changing his course, and going back to the outside. But I followed, always gaining a little, and for many centuries we were like two needles weaving a crazy pattern across the galaxy. Then—it might have been one chance in billions—we entered space where there was a star, your own sun. We escaped it, but I was injured, and even vessels such as ours could not withstand the destructiveness of a star. I fell to this planet, through the thin outer shell, and for a time swung back and forth at its center. A hundred thousand years ago, my vessel came to rest, a tomb, utterly useless, and here I have been since—useless, but for my dreams.

"Now, my dreams are done. I will dream yours for you."

"No!"

The sun burst into Stanford's eyes. He would return to the ship. He would return to the Earth, to Eloise, to an atom war if necessary.

He would tell the Head of the Commission that Mars would never be anyone's. Fifty thousand men might come,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but they would never find Mars, they would find only themselves, and images of their past, and fifty thousand other peoples' images, with now and then a chill wind from things yet to come: a puppet world with a labyrinthine brain embedded in its heart for a master.

No, he would dream his own dreams.

Stanford set out for the rocket, but soon halted. The homing device on his wrist had changed direction. For a time he followed the new course, until he noticed the pointer idly swinging in circles. He walked this way and then that, hoping to see some familiar bit of terrain, but the sand was featureless.

He watched the distance indicator to see if he were getting closer to the rocket's radio signal, but the indicator would show a mile at one step and twenty miles at the next. It was no use.

The sun!

He had come east to the city; now he would go west. He knew it was a matter of some ten miles; he would count his steps. How many feet to the step, how many steps to the mile? He turned his back on the sun—and there—

Was another sun.

Just as bright. One of them was a dream sun, but which? He would guess; then he would walk ten miles away from one, and if he did not see the rocket he would walk twenty miles in the opposite direction. He blinked his eyes, and the sky was filled with suns.

Stanford dropped to the sand. He had been running wildly, in all directions. The air was far too thin; he would have to learn to move slowly. The blackness came over him.

"I could put a mountain over your rocket, and you could walk over it. I could bury the rocket in a swamp. You would never know."

The voice, Stanford knew, was no dream.

"ACCLIMATIZE," Hendricks was saying. "That's all you have to do. Get used to the air, the gravity. You know. Get used to Mars. Until then, take it easy with everything."

He went off to dance with a chesty blonde, a reasonable facsimile of a recent film star. Stanford leaned on the bar of the Happy Valley, watching him, no longer feeling concerned with the identity of this particular Hendricks. Stanford had awakened in his hotel room about noon. Beyond the windows he could see the city, and in his memory he saw the desert. Even then, he was not quite certain which was real, which was the dream.

He had not even been especially surprised to find an envelope awaiting him at the desk, containing a dividend check from some investments he apparently owned. Nor, wandering without purpose through the streets, had he been surprised to come upon the Happy Valley, or to find Hendricks there—although he had seen Hendricks earlier hurrying in the opposite direction and again on another street entering a theater.

Each one was a little different, and one might really have been Hendricks.

The juke box stopped playing, and in its pause Stanford saw her coming through the door, the red hair, the impudent grin—he could almost smell the perfume.

"Hi, Stan," she called.

"Let me go home," he said aloud, and the others looked at him curiously.

An answer came to him, although it was the last time he was ever to hear the voice.

"Home? You don't understand. The one I followed for so long is entombed too, in your own world. He was not injured, as I was, so there are no flaws in his dreams. But, what dreams they are! Why did I follow him for so long, so far? I was his guard, his keeper—and he escaped. He is criminally, hopelessly insane."

The juke box started again, and without a word Eloise pulled him to the center of the floor. They danced, for a long while. Once he held her too tight, and he remembered his hand going through Hendricks' shoulder, but he did not make the mistake again. He was getting used to Mars. ● ● ●

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He stepped out of tomorrow . . . and faded into nowhere!

The Ambassador from the 21st Century

By HARRY J. SHAY

I FIRST read of "The Ambassador from the 21st Century"—as you may have, too—some months ago. It was a news item included in the newspaper for a touch of humor. It reported:

"Washington, D.C.—Here in the nation's capital, where there are already more ambassadors than there are lamp posts, the threat of still another foreign representative has been happily averted.

"Strangely enough, the new ambassador was not from Lower Slobovia, which is about the only spot not already represented, but claimed to be "The Ambassador from the 21st Century,' no less.

"Not only that, but he was the *official* ambassador from the United States of the year 2007 A.D., to the United States of our present year of 1952 A.D.

"It all began two weeks ago, when a man appeared at the gates of the White House. He wanted to see the President.

"Since he did not have an appointment, the White House guards insisted upon more information. In addition to introducing himself as J. Piedmont Bows, he reluctantly informed them that he was a U.S. Senator of the year 2007 A.D.

"As he explained it, he had traveled fifty-five years back to our time in order to save the world of the next generation from complete annihilation.

"Each day, for three weeks, he repeated his demand to White House guards that he be admitted to see the President. The guards humored him as a harmless crank, of which Washington has its quota.

"The situation might have been tolerated indefinitely, had not Bows become

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

violent one morning last week. As a result of his outburst, he appeared yesterday before a sanity commission.

"Questioned by the sanity commission, he insisted he was a U.S. Senator of fifty-five years in the future.

"He said that in the year 2007 A.D., the world and all inhabitants were being totally destroyed by a devastating war which seemed to have no possible end except the complete destruction of civilization.

"In desperation, he claimed, the U.S. Government ordered a speedup in experiments with a time travel machine first proposed by a Dr. L. Michael Majeske in 1987. Fighting against the limited time left because of the great war, an experimental model was completed and he was named to undertake the mission.

"His mission, he explained, was to travel back to our year of 1952, and with his knowledge of future events—past events to him—he could give us information which would enable us to amend and avert the developments which produced the great war he described.

"Although the sanity commission agreed that Bows had a remarkable mind for science fiction and great potentialities as a dramatic actor, his violence at the White House gates forced them to take action against his psychopathic condition.

"He has been ordered committed to a mental institution."

LIKE most people who read the news item—yourself included, perhaps—I felt amused by the story and at the same time a bit saddened by the tragedy of confinement. But a moment later I dismissed the story from my thoughts, turning my attention to more serious news.

It was six weeks later when I read the next report of the incident. Perhaps you recall it. It was a short item which stated:

"Washington, D.C.—J. Piedmont Bows, 'The Ambassador from the 21st Century,' has mysteriously disappeared from the mental hospital where he was confined by order of a sanity commission.

"Authorities report his escape remains a mystery. His room was found locked and no bars had been removed from his window.

"He simply vanished."

I COULD not help but feel a tinge of pleasure from the report; since if the man remained away from the White House and otherwise returned to the normal condition he apparently occupied prior to his outbreak as evidenced by no earlier mental record, he would avoid the unhappiness of confinement. I could hardly wish confinement on any person, and especially one with such a vivid imagination.

Once again I dismissed the story from my thoughts. It probably would have remained forgotten, had I not read a feature story in the Sunday newspaper last week. The fascinating aspect it placed before me tantalized my mind and left me no rest.

It was one of those feature stories which recalled or speculated on old news as a diversion for the relaxed Sunday newspaper reader. It stated:

"Can 'The Ambassador from the 21st Century' be dismissed as simply another sea dragon or flying saucer fantasy, or was he on a genuine mission from the future which we ignored, thereby sending our children's world to its doom?

"I asked this question to the members of the sanity commission which examined him and to others who had contact with him, including White House guards. Their answers offered the following information:

"The man popularly known as 'The Ambassador from the 21st Century identified himself as J. Piedmont Bows.

"He was a tall, distinguished-appearing man of about forty-five. He was judged to be well-educated and of superior intellect, *except for the illusion from which he suffered.*

"There is no positive information as to where he originally came from or where he is now.

"He claimed he was born nine years *from now,* on September 18, 1961, at

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Indianapolis, Indiana. He claimed his father to be a Donald R. Bows, originally of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and his mother to be an Elayne McClish, originally of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

"According to his story, a world-shattering war beyond present-day conceivability broke out in 1994. Since this is but forty-two years from now, this means that, if his story were true, it would happen during the life of many adults of today, as well as during the adult life of our children.

"It was his mission, he said, to prevent the 'War of Annihilation,' as he called it, by informing us of the mistakes which led to the war.

"As he explained it, he was to 'travel back to 1952' armed with data covering daily events for the balance of our own year. As we checked them and found them to be correct, the validity of his mission would be proved beyond a doubt. Not later than the end of the year we would be able to accept the remarkable feat of time-travel and regulate some of our future acts in accordance with information supplied by him.

"Unfortunately, he claimed, just before the zero hour for his mission arrived, a terrific air attack was launched against the city where the secret time-travel machine was being constructed. Fearing that the machine might be destroyed without enough time remaining to construct another, it was hastily decided that he would undertake the mission that very instant. Time could not even be spared for him to send to his office for the data covering daily events for the balance of this year.

"Thus, he claimed, he undertook the mission with inadequate preparation. In fact, he said, he did not know if the machine itself had been destroyed in the air raid after he was 'sent back to 1952,' or if it remained intact and could be used to send an additional representative 'back' with the daily events record as evidence of the authenticity of the mission.

"He added that experiments with the machine had not advanced to the point where it was definitely known whether the machine was required to be in operation to return him to 2007 A.D., or whether the return would be automatic as a result of an unknown time limitation factor.

"Although the sanity commission members stated that none of them seriously believed the story at any time, they agreed that his 'sincerity and desperation' prompted them to question him further than they would normally do with such a case.

"In reply to questions concerning his own knowledge of future events—supposedly past events to him—which could be verified, he said that his personal knowledge of such events was as scant as any person's knowledge of daily events which took place ten years before he was born.

"He said he could only offer his knowledge of 'general history,' which included the name of the next President of the United States and similar information. Unfortunately, the nearest 'general event' he could recall was the Presidential election, and therefore no part of his story can be verified until then and that is four years away.

"After this testimony, the sanity commission declined to hear more or investigate further and ordered his commitment.

"The fact of the matter is, however, that although 'The Ambassador from the 21st Century' failed to produce tangible evidence in support of his claim, neither has any person been able to explain away certain questions that remain unanswered.

"If Bows was not from the year 2007 A.D., where did he come from?

"If Bows has not in fact returned to the year 2007 A.D. because of the unknown time limitation factor of the time-travel machine, how and where did he vanish?"

WHEN I finished reading the feature story, I knew I would find no rest until I investigated one statement.

I boarded a train for Grand Rapids, Michigan.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Grand Rapids I had little difficulty locating a Miss Elayne McClish. I found her to be a lovely young lady who, if J. Piedmont Bows' story were true, he certainly could be proud to call "Mother."

I explained my visit to her, but found no apology necessary. Her interest in the possibility of a genuine "Ambassador from the 21st Century" was as overpowering as my own.

I don't know if I really expected the trip to Grand Rapids to place my mind at ease once again. But if I did, it failed its purpose, for I find myself more troubled than ever.

Suppose the story of "The Ambassador from the 21st Century" was true. What will happen now?

Has he returned to the year 2007 A.D.?

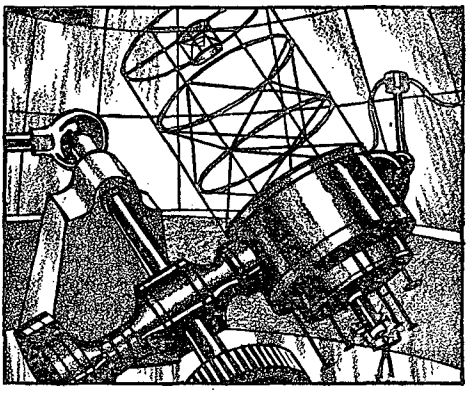
If so, is it now too late for him to return again with evidence to support his claim?

Or if he cannot return and we verify his statements after the Presidential election subsequent events, how will we know what must be done to prevent the "War of Annihilation" without knowing what the mistakes were which produced the war?

If his story was true, are our children, and those of us who will live another 42 years, to personally experience and suffer the horrible war he described? Are we to pay with our lives and our children's lives? Are we to see the civilization we and previous generations built be destroyed because we doubted even when warned?

I am more troubled than you by these questions, perhaps, because while you have probably dismissed the whole series of reports as amusing items built around a mental case and the newspapers' desire to entertain as well as inform, I cannot do so.

You see, I have met a Miss Elayne McClish of Grand Rapids, and she might very well be the future mother of a future J. Piedmont Bows. I feel this very strongly because my name is Donald R. Bows, and I am from Milwaukee—and I always did like Indianapolis—and Elayne says she does, too.



Look Forward to Next Month's Special Feature!

FARAWAY PLANETS

By WILLY LEY

TOP MAN AMONG TODAY'S SPACE PIONEERS!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Continued from page 6)

and came up with the answer that it would require every bit of wattage contained in two flashlight dry cells. All the same we bet that when they do build an Earth-to-Moon transmitter they'll load it with a couple of thousand kilowatts.

Staggering Problems

While discussions of a man-made satellite make colorful reading, opinion is slowly solidifying around the idea that it isn't a practical idea after all. The job of flying so much heavy equipment into space and assembling it up there involves problems which are staggering. If a satellite we must have, it seems more sensible to look for a small and as yet undiscovered second satellite of Earth (though astronomer Richardson says chances are slim of finding one) or else use Luna itself, ready made and waiting.

But in the meantime, the discussions are healthy, clearing the air, ironing out misunderstandings, getting more information to the general public and helping the experts themselves to pool their findings. It may well be that Rosen is right and that out of all this hassle may come a new caution and a new period of further research and testing before any move is made.

So we repeat: If you've got your Moon ticket, hold on to it. There may be a slightly longer wait for seats!

ETHERGRAMS

GUESS we scared them—only one letter apiece from the hatchet men this month. And none from Calkins. All right, Gregg, you can come out of the doghouse now, the weather's turned cold.

SURPRISE
by Joe Keough

Dear Sam, Looking over various mags (s-f of course), I came to a strange new thing (Allah be praised!) a framed format—not even so much as a stray title sprawled across the illo. All the info was either above or below the drawing, in (get this!) neat symmetrical proportion. Upon looking at index, I saw it was one of Emsh's master-pieces. "This isn't S.S.," I told myself, my antennae bulging out of their sockets. "Surely Sam Mines would NEVER bow to the will of us fen and allow a bordered cover on Startling! He's the independent type." So, scrutinizing it closer, I saw that it *was* S.S., thought Sam had either taken a turn for the better or Pines had relieved him of his duties, and plunked down twenty-five centimes.

Sam, the one thing that never changes with this mag is TEV. All the pithy remarks from the ed. (Sam, that's *YOU!*) would be enough to sell the mag even if the stories were only Grade C stuff—hmmm, well . ... anyway, that crack of yours in the Dec. issue about the "right ball" being somewhere in the vicinity of Alpha Centauri took the inter-galactic prize for the month of October *(why* is it that you say DEC. and the mag hits the stands two months ahead—TIME WARP??) Anyway, orchids to you on that one (pardon if I steal your line).

I hear someone wants to know why rockets work in space when there's nothing out there for them to push on—did it ever occur to him that rockets out there work by pushing against the back of the ship? They do, too.

LONG VIEW held the attention of a lot of your readers, especially the one like me with an interest in Chemistry. Fletch Pratt comes up with a lot of new ideas, and the good part about it is he gets 'em down o.k. too.

Ken Crossen also did it again with his LOVE THAT AIR. He has such a good style in portraying the characters of his heroes. Maybe that's his secret. ("What? If I know the answer, why don't I write stf myself?") Well, once I tried a few times but it got so that all I dreamt of at night were little pink rejection slips. A pox on all cold-blooded editors!

Therefore I'll dare to close this vibration with a poem:

With all this talk
From Henry Mosk.,
You'd think he'd bust a suture;
But he'll keep on,
('Until he's gone')
Extolling Cap'n Future.

—*63 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, Ont., Canada.*

This is the kind of fan we need more of—consider this two bits well spent for our pithy remarks alone. Why bother with au-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thors at all? But you're an author yourself, Joe.

A pox, a hex, says Joe,
On eds with Freon 12
Where blood should go.
Pity scribes who dig and delve
And little reck or think,
A slip awaits, its color pink!

Only our rejection slips are yellow. Fair warning: if you characters don't stop forcing me to write poetry the entire foundations of the English language stand in the gravest danger. Semantics may topple on its throne, van Vogt become unemployed, dictionaries become obsolete, schools thrown into utter confusion. Do you realize what you're doing?

THAT HURT LOOK

by John D. Clark

My dear Sam: Will you kindly take one step front and center so that I can kick your teeth conveniently down your throat? This is in re the December Startling. In it you have published a sketchlike article entitled "The Silicone World" and have credited it to Fletcher Pratt. I should like to inform you that, except for the coordinates and names of the planets involved, every damned word of that job is mine. Check with Fletcher if you don't believe it. And look at the so-called style of the thing. It certainly does not belong to fpratt.

What happened was this. I was to do an introduction to a series of three stories to be published in one set of hard covers. I invented the world and set up its chemical and physical conditions. And from then on the authors took over, independently. The results should be interesting. (advt.) But I was damned proud of the cockeyed chemistry I invented for those planets, and it irks me, to put it mildly, that my worlds should be published over another name. Not to mention the fact that you pay by the word. How you got the idea that Fletcher wrote the chemistry I don't know—probably it was a foul-up on somebody's part.

But I should like to have the error rectified. A reasonably conspicuous announcement that the "Silicone World" is my creation, plus the payment for the article (remembering that to invent a chemistry of life is somewhat more difficult than writing about it) would soothe not only my highly ruffled ego but my even more disturbed disposition.

Regards—and don't be so damned "Startling" in your attributions!—*17 Hussa Place, Denville, N.J.*

For further light on above hassle, please continue to the next letter.

THE LOWDOWN

by Fletcher Pratt

Dear Sam:—Most of what Dr. (he is one) Clark says is perfectly true, and I can only conclude that the original annotation that he was a prime mover in preparing the specifications for Uller got bitten off and chewed up by Jerry Bixby in the excitement of receiving a communique from Gregg Calkins.

However, to get the record straight on how stf authors work, it might be mentioned that the original impulse came from the other end. "What about a world with a silicone chemistry?" says I, and Dr. Clark went to work. He threw in the fluorine one for good measure, and a hell of a lot of trouble it made for all the authors involved. He seems to like to arrange things so his worlds can't be inhabited.

I suggest you send an expedition accompanied by a bugler to Danville, New Jersey, and there affix to Dr. Clark's manly chest the Order of Space, second class. If you're fresh out of buglers, have the order telephoned to him. He won't like that because he doesn't believe it's possible, but as long as he gets his decoration I don't see how he can reasonably kick.—*23 West 58th Street, New York 19, N.Y.*

Jerry Bixby indignantly denies the allegation that he masticated any part, portion or appendage of THE LONG VIEW. "All those silicones on the teeth," he asserted, "might give you a polish the dentist would envy, but what would it do to the digestion?"

The mystery of the missing credit marches on. Meanwhile we are looking for a good bugler. Hope he is one of those double-tonguing experts, because we can't find Dr. Clark's name anywhere on the original mss. What annotation was it and wonder what happened to it?

WATER UNDER THE BRIDGES

by Henry Moskowitz

Mines Dear Sam: I bought the December issue of SS last Friday. And that night I saw "Tales of Tomorrow" use it. Quite a plug. Do you have a story by Paul Tripp coming up?

Well, 1952 is over and done with—as far as SS is concerned. It's been a good year, the mag's best. In that year SS—and your other mags to a degree—has become the top mag in the field.

So, what could be more proper than to review the last twelve issues of STARTLING STORIES.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Best Novel—Now, there are two ways in which I can choose this one. First in a prejudiced light. Second in a sensible one. Being prejudiced in favor of space opera I would naturally choose *The Hellflower,* by George O. Smith. This was one *hell* of a story! But sensibly I would choose *The Lovers,* by Phillip José Farmer. This is it! The top story for the year—in any mag—I bet! While I agree with Sam Moskowitz about it not being a new type of science-fiction, its merits speak for themselves.

The others might rank like this: *Journey to Barkut* and *The Glory That Was,* by Murray Leinster and L. Sprague de Camp respectively. *Well of the Worlds,* by Henry Kuttner, next because I wanted a new Kuttner novel. Then *Vulcan's Dolls*—this could easily have been SS's best if not for TV. For Space Opera: *Big Planet,* by Jack Vance, and *Passport to Pax,* by Kendell Foster Crossen. Crossen isn't as adept with space opera as Vance. *Asylum Earth* won against *The Star Dice* by many a length. And I didn't read *Dragon's Island.*

Novelets and short stories are harder to evaluate. For the former either a Crossen or Brackett. For the latter I'd pick one by McGregor, I think. But there was such a wealth of shorts. It would have been Clarke's *All The Time in the World* if not for that stark, staring error.

Now, as to the December ish.

Doubtlessly Pratt put a lot of work into *The Long View,* but there was something missing. Length. I think the book version will show it off to better advantage. Of course, it's simple to see that Crossen utilizes a basic plot. But the man's way of putting it down on paper is great. *Love That Air* was yummy, just yummy. I can hardly wait for his first book (Greenburg, take a hint).

Sail On! Sail On! was more than slightly wacky. And a very different thing than his (Farmer's) *The Lovers.* But I'd call it fair, nothing more.

ROFTCSEFP was good—as usual. That final note killed me! I can see it now. The plane from Chi lands. A mad dash into the city. Another madder dash to 10 East 40th Street. No elevator, so Bix dashes (dashing today, isn't he?) up the stairs. It's only twelve stories up. He types out the bit. Then he goes home to catch up on his sleep.

Twenty-six letters in TEV this time. Man! It's a lie. I ain't sent you two or three letters a day for one heck of a long while.

To Bobby Gene Warner: You're nuts! I think. So long as there is space opera, there is a place for Captain Future.—*Three Bridges, New Jersey.*

This is most generous of you, suh, to call it SS's best year and to top that by considering SS the top magazine in the field. We'd have said it ourselves, but we're modest, as we are so fond of pointing out.

You saw the bit on "Tales of Tomorrow," did you? It was just a thing—no story by Tripp is coming our way; I'd call his specialty whimsy rather than science fiction, but everybody seemed to think it was a nice idea to use a real magazine on the show—lends verisimilitude and all that sort of thing.

Hank, would you rather be a critic or a writer?

PLEA FOR SS

by Corporal Lin Carter US53081066

Dear Sam: It's been quite a while since I wrote to SS, but a lot has happened in the meanwhile. Happened to run across a copy of the issue with BIG PLANET in it a while back, and it felt so good to read SS after so long that I just *had* to sit down and write you a letter.

Here in Korea your magazine is next to impossible to come by, a rarity equalled only by the *Necronomicon.* I haven't seen an issue in all the ten months I've been over here. Notice you've changed the format considerably, and I applaude the new cover setup. Very attractive, even if I don't like the artist.

Vance's novel was even more of a technicolor travelogue than most of his, but it just so happens I *like* travelogues, so it was okay. The entire novel was smooth, well-written and cleverly plotted, and I thought all those weird and wonderful cities, kingdoms, et al, were simply fascinating. Only thing that really turned my stomach was the fake happy ending, where our noble hero clasps the gal in his arms, prostitute, traitress and spy though she was. That I couldn't take. We guys can take a lot from the ladies, but not treachery like that.

Perhaps it was because of my long abstinence from SS, but all the other stories I read with wild enthusiasm and a high degree of pleasure. The letter column was enjoyable as of old, although I recognize only a few names therein. Hello, Astra, long time no see. Hi, Gibson! Coming in on the middle of them, these current feuds and discussions made little or no sense to me.

I'll be rotating back to the States in a month or so, and believe me, one of the things I shall enjoy most is getting re-acquainted with STARTLING and TWS again. That Hamilton novel slated for next issue looks wonderful.

And before I sign off here, let me register a heartfelt plea to you folks. Not for me, because I am rotating soon, but for the other guys you people know are here in Korea. Over here it is very, very hard to get science-fiction magazines. I know of lots of boys around here

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that read SF back Stateside, and miss it very much now that they are eight thousand miles away. They couldn't ask for a more welcome pre-Christmas present than for some of you to wrap up a couple of your old mags and send them over. How about it, good people? It wouldn't take more than a couple minutes of your time, and a few cents postage. How about sending a few mags to the guys you know in Korea?—*Hq & Hq Company, 32d Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, APO 7, c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, California.*

Here and there in these letter columns have been printed remarks from fans who are suffering from an over-supply of magazines and an under-supply of space. Corporal Carter's situation provides a perfect answer if you've got the postage. Ship him some magazines, won't you?

SAFE HARBOR

By William W. Miller

Mines Pale-fruit-jar-and-a-fillet-gumbo: Tallyho, Samuel old topper! Lookut who is out of the Navy and battling his way thru the muck and mire (and Democrats) of civilian life! Yes, Willie Miller has been given a full pardon from Uncle Sam's thirteen button battalion and turned loose to run amuck in the poor, unsuspecting world.

I've been out and about since June but haven't read any science fiction since the last part of July; so when I stumbled across the Nov. ish of SS the other day I naturally flang mine 25 sheckles on le comptoir and fled home with your mag carefully clutched in my sweaty little hands. Upon reaching the peace and privacy of my cell I began reading. . . .

Lo and behold, wha hoppen, Sam? The issue wasn't worth a . . . (well it wasn't!) In fact, it wasn't good nohow, nowhere, noways, atall. Imagine *me* having to say this about SS. It just cuts me all up inside. Also, my two bits is gone. (Now there is something to really break me up.)

What's with this STAR DICE? R.D.(ee) rolled snake-eyes on that one. My time would have been better spent if I'd drove out in the country and read Burma Shave signs.

A CROOK IN TIME is one of the funniest stories you have come across you say? Awww, Sam!! Wuss wrong; you getting ulcers? (*More* ulcers I meant) Someone cutting your likker? Mebbe you have a bad case of "Smut." This is a common stomach disorder brought on by swallowing Tums the wrong way.

Well, I ran right down and purchased the December issue and certainly hope that I just stumbled upon one bad one, and that the "whole basket hasn't gone bad."

Und zo, mitt head hung low I creep uff to mine zix room packing case to continue mine zearch for knowledge. If you are lugky Herr Mines you might neffer hear from me again. (Ha. You should be so lucky!)—*Box 3-5324, University of Maryland, College Park, Md.*

P.S. Could I coax correspondence from anyone?

What's with this fruit and sea food salutation? Has going back on a civilian diet curdled your stomach? When you were in the Navy you liked practically everything in SS. Now that you're out and have to battle your way through a sea of Republicans you like nothing any more. And I used to think you had a sense of humor. . . . say, how does this "Smut" start? I mean what are the symptoms—that dark brown taste in the morning as though the whole Russian army marched over your tongue in their socks? Ga-a.

DEDICATED CAUSES

by Helen Huber

Dear Sam: A couple or six months ago I sent you a tome full of a message of brotherly love. You liked it and printed it, even asking me to come again. Now see what you did? I'm back.

I want to be fair about a few things, and although I admit each person is entitled to his or her own opinion, I feel that no intelligent discussion can be embarked upon unless participants are in full possession of *accurate* facts. This feeling arises from the unfair way in which Mrs. Corby makes a general statement that religion is the biggest enemy of birth control, and the way in which Rev. C. M. Moorehead chooses by inference to narrow her discussion down to the Roman Catholic Church as the enemy in question, and as only one third branch of general christianity. In reading various letters and comments in STARTLING and the sister magazine TWS, it becomes all too apparent that many people have misinterpreted the Roman Catholic Attitude on birth control, with either casual resentment or indignant hate. I'd like to be permitted to clarify that attitude for the benefit of the misinformed. As a Catholic myself, I know whereof I speak.

The Roman Catholic church does not condemn birth control per se. It condemns the use of artificial methods to accomplish that result, and it requires that sufficient reason be present to employ any natural method. By that I mean rhythm, or temperature control, or voluntary abstinence.

The Catholic church would not wish any of her people to cram their homes full of children they could not feed, clothe, or educate. They require that Catholic people have as many children as they can properly feed,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clothe or educate. However, obviously it is not necessary for parents to provide each child with a Cadillac, a summer home and an unlimited allowance before they could think of having another child. The church feels that having children is more important than having unnecessary luxuries.

Decent clothes, proper food, adequate housing, and ample education are necessities today, and each child born should have the best their parents can afford. But extra cars, summer homes, and excessive liquor bills are not necessities that should postpone children. The church considers lack of adequate housing, insufficient economic means, illness of the mother, or any valid reason, to be reason enough to practice any *natural* control. It requires only that its people seek the council of their superiors to determine the validity of that reason.

If a fact like that makes the Catholic religion seem too harsh for some people, please remember that any religion that's worth it's salt is worth making sacrifices for, and that any dedicated cause has certain fixed rules which must be obeyed for the success of its existence. Also please remember that a Communist will do anything at all the party line requires to further the cause of Communism in this or any other country. A true Commie will live free love, or get married, or marry a member of a different race where that race is not usually encouraged to intermarry (although I don't call that wrong, we are all God's children), or kill a person too damaging to the Communistic cause, or spread lies to children and indifferent citizens to gain its popularity. So, why should not a Catholic adhere to his own code? The main Catholic body is strong and indestructible, and the greatest single enemy of Communism in the world today.

I guess you hate me, now, Sam, and won't ask me to come back because I've run away with myself and I really meant to make it short. I liked the whole issue (Dec.), as I'm very fond of Ken Crossen and Virgil Finlay. Your pulp has more class than the general field. Guess I could call you the Champagne of Mottled Pulps. Like that?—*20 Stanley St., Irvington, N. J.*

Don't hate you at all—you have as much right here with your opinion as anyone else and who am I to say you may not even be right? That's the trouble with this world and its elections—you never know who is right. I would like to point out though, while we're on the subject, that to a non-Catholic, the difference between "natural" and "artificial" birth control would seem to be a quibble, since the end result is the same. The unborn child might not appreciate the fine distinctions of theology. I am also a little baffled by your fondness for Ken Crossen, who specializes in clay feet.

When you get a chance, Helen, write and explain that postscript to me, won't you? Mottled pulps?

ICONOCLAST
by Larry Maddock

Dear Sam: It saddens me to see that Snarley Seibel, the sadistically cynical soul whose sometimes sage salutations satisfy this sagacious stffer, has voluntarily consigned himself to a polite form of penal servitude. Having myself had some encounters with the "military mind" I have decided, after long consideration, that regimentation is the greatest insult to human intelligence since the advent of organized religion. I suppose this statement entitles me to a few broadsides from the pen of Rev. C. M. Moorehead, but for his benefit I will qualify the above statement to mean merely the reams of senseless dogma with which theologists from time eternal have been cluttering up the religions of mankind. Feel better, Sam, that I don't brand religion per se as idiotic? I would, however, appreciate a chance to peruse the "four pages of a slashing attack on the mythology of theology" that you deleted from Peggy Lindemann's epistle. Mebbe I should drop a line direct to Peggy?

Sam, seems I recall your saying on Chicon's editor's panel that you had a weakness for space opera, when it was asked whether you considered such thud-and-blunder stf a fitting medium for "sneaking up on juvenile readers with the club of *thought*." As I have a similar weakness, I truculantly turn to my trusty typewriter, and doggedly bat out opus upon epic, with a few short extravaganzas thrown in for good measure. For some strange reason, this leaves me little time to do the voluminous amount of reading I would like to do. Consequently, I didn't get around to reading THE LOVERS—but I did peruse the comments that story inspired, including one bit of complaint that writers are afraid to write stories dealing with such controversial topics: sex, religion, etc. To me, both the reader's complaint and the writer's dilemma are easy to see, as I have shared the conviction that such subjects *handled well* (by that I mean convincingly) are legitimate material. But—alas!—the wrath of prudes and fanatics has descended upon my head so often for what seemed to me were, totally innocuous themes. that I can see why authors hesitate to express their ideas on anything more controversial than the sociological implications between hero and villain. I, too, would like to see more of the type of stf THE LOVERS evidently was, but even that curious breed of chroniclers who spew forth stf is reluctant to stick its neck out when it knows what the repercussions are apt to be.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Question: How does an itinerant chronicler build up a collection of stf when each time he moves he finds that he must dispose of what literary gems he has acquired in the past few months? Each time I pull up stakes and traipse off for another part of the country I am faced with a grave alternative—either throw away the stf and take my clothes with me or go naked and keep the 'zines. Anybody got a spare collection of microfilm equipment I can purchase cheap? On this happy note I will go back to trying to add 30,000 words to the 15,000 I did yesterday. (Egad! It started out last week as a short story!)—*315 Canal St., Eaton Rapids, Mich.*

To some extent you're tilting at windmills, Larry. The battle of dogma has been fought and at least partly won. What you can say today in the public prints is largely governed by your own good taste and good taste is something that I think should not be abandoned for the mere pleasure of frankness. Apply that measure to your themes, innocuous or not, and see if it helps.

FOREVER AND EVER

by Ray Capella

Dear Mines: Wonder what stf is coming to . . . A Nov. 1 Post carries color interiors by stf artist Mayan . . . Pic pubs "How Flying Saucers Fly" by John W. Campbell Jr. . . . Collier's runs article-series on how close we are to the moon. . . . Standard puts out another SS-SPACE STORIES. . . . and one certain editor who works in a mine queries: "What is a TRIANGLE cover?"

Oh my fem-covered aSF! That an stf ed should ask such a question! You . . . Ig*nor*omnibus! (Thank you, Churchy LaFemme), To be brief: A Triangle cover is a pic containing the three-cornered theme of the luscious fem, the leering (or drooling, as the case may be) BEM, and the handsome hero. *Any* ole pic with the spaceman protecting the curvacious fem from dire danger is a triangle cover. Wonder how many fans wrote in to tell you. . . .

Daring you to try and match the corn and clichés on the last paragraph, I proceed to make a brief comment on SS for Dec. To wit: Cover is beautiful—ditto for layout in color margin. THE LONG VIEW was too short (not the view—the yarn). That *is* a pity, because it was such a *slick* story. Very smooth and interesting—but it was a novelet, not a novel. Following close on its heels is WHOEVER YOU ARE. As for Crossen—he oughta try straight *fts*, a serious stf yarn or a horror story. These novelets with the stereotyped plot and characters can't be held up by his wit alone, no matter how droll his pen.

Haven't paid much attention to the to-do over SSSeibel until now. But this letter I read in your latest . . . well, I must compliment him on his *after modesty* and fondly wish him luck on his seafaring—so long as the ship goes the way of Atlantis! Don't worry about the crew, Sam, "when Seibel sails, he sails alone" . . . and you may quote me.

Last words: I'm not trying to win you over after the brickbats—but I must congratulate you—SPACE STORIES is a success. It's everything you wanted it to be—a mag with *good* thud-and-blunder! And you may congratulate me—this is the closest my missiles ever got to being seriously written! With that staggering line, I leave you, remaining . . . "A Thrilling Pub" Fan Forever."—*480 Clinton Ave., Brooklyn, N.Y.*

So we're an ignoromnibus. We got lots of company, anyway, because NOBODY wrote in to tell us. All fandom held its breath and waited for you to explain. That make you feel important?

I liked the little flags you drew around your closing line "A Thrilling Pub Fan Forever—too bad we couldn't reproduce them. Real gone crazy.

FANETTICS

by MariAn Cox

Dear Sam: Aren't you a little mixed up, ole boy? Marion Bradley *likes* her name spelled with an "o." She told me so. On the other hand, a curse upon the editor who spells *my* name thataway. May something he disagrees with eat him. So remember: it's Mari*O*n Bradley and Mari*A*n Cox. Got it straight now?

Thanks for printing my announcement of THE FANETTES. Lots of response so far. However, you didn't venture to voice an opinion on the club. Maybe Joe Gibson, bless his little heart, has you scared to say anything one way or another. Hmmmm? We're thinking of making Joe our mascot.

And speaking of Joe, I'd like to mention a thought he gave me the other day. There have been other all-gal fan clubs, but every one flopped. Why? Joe thinks it's because male fans were excluded, even as an audience, and the gals soon lost interest. Could be, could be, and that's why we're interested in getting the guys to sub to our fanzine. That way they can know just what's going on. So far, THE FEMZINE seems to be a big success, with both guys and gals. Even though the fellows can't contribute to the zine, they seem to like knowing how the women feel. Fifteen cents will bring a sample copy your way, boys, so how about it?

I don't like strapless bras, either. At times, however, they can be counted among the neces-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sities of life, particularly if a gal favors low necklines.

Now, a request. Having finally located a few—very few—fen in or near Sioux City, I'm working on a local fan club. We'll probably meet every other week and have a great time talking stf. So come on, fans. Any fans in or near Sioux City. You don't even have to be human, although it would help. Please? Aw, come on, fen. It isn't gonna hurt. Just call me at the air base. (And for those who haven't already been told, I am *not* in the Air Force. My father is.) The extension is 209, ring one. Get in on the fun, fen!!—*79th A. B. Sq., Sioux City, Iowâ.*

Really want my opinion on the all-fem club, Marian? It seems like a colossal waste to me. Try it, but I am inclined to think that hen parties work out well only when the gals concerned are so maladjusted that they don't like, or aren't comfortable with boys, and really prefer the companionship of other women. Is this what you want? Better leave the door open. I agree with you, though, that the fanmag might be quite successful—men are eternally curious about feminine viewpoint, so there would be a large curiosity value. Keep us posted. Meanwhile here's—

THE OTHER HALF

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Mine Dear Sam: No, it's me that will have *your* scalp! *MariOn.* MARION! NOT Marian, but MariOn, PLEASE. Marion, Marion, Marion—boo-hoo, hoo, hoo, won't ANYBODY *PLEASE* SPELL MY NAME RIGHT? The next person who calls me Marian will receive a stink-bomb in the mail, collect.

I know that "Marion" is a man's name, that females usually spell it Marian, but the two names have a totally different etymology. Marion is derived from the Hebrew Maryam. *Marian* is the adjective "Pertaining to Mary"—as, the Marian Wars—the wars of Queen Mary.

PLEASE!!! I fought a small private war with fandom over that point, back in 1948; won't you please LOOK at the by-line on the next ms I send you, or my signature on a fanzine, or something? I'll even send you a photostat of my birth certificate!

Did I ever get around to mentioning that THE LOVERS is your finest novel, bar none, since Merwin's HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS . . . and before that you'd have to go way back to Brackett's SHADOW OVER MARS. Is this really a first novel? Egad, then, maybe there's room for me somewhere!

I didn't want to get entangled in this birth-control hassle, but I think people are overlooking one point. Fundamentally, women want to have as many children as compatible with their health . . . it is social pressure that interferes with this. It isn't the women with six or eight children who want to discover some method to keep from having more—a woman with six children, you'll discover, usually grins broadly and says "The more the merrier" if you ask her if she wants another.

At present, birth-control is being mis-applied at the wrong level of society. Instead of using it to keep the feeble-minded, the diseased and the undesirable from too-prolific overbreeding, it is being used as an excuse for healthy, normal, well-to-do women to prolong their leisure time. The upper class woman has no excuse for refusing to have children—but she quickly snatches at some apologist of birth-control, and says, in effect, the world is overpopulated, so I am doing my bit by having only one or two children." Get that woman down to case and you will discover that she refuses to have children because it would interfere with her outside activity. The women who have most children are down at the level where they have nothing outside the home to interest them.

Actually, most economists are worried about what they call the "one-child sterility" at the upper levels of society. Women who can afford elaborate houses, emotionally fulfilling social lives, expensive clothes—these women do not feel the deep emotional need to have children, and, living a full life without children, they can afford to take a "sophisticated view" of birth control. Lower-level women, with incomes where one child is an economic strain and two a hardship, end up with five and six children simply because they have nothing else to occupy their minds. The bearing of a child is the primary emotional satisfaction for a woman—and, in the long run, it is the woman who determines how many children there will be in the family. All a woman's other pursuits are consciously or subconsciously substitutes for the satisfaction of childbearing and rearing.

Now, I'm ready for the deluge of indignation from feminine readers who consider themselves feminine instead of female and would prefer to believe that they have only a "figure" and not a "body." The fact remains. Unless applied statistically over immense areas of population, scientifically and where needed, all attempts at birth control have their origin in one thing; the selfishness of a woman who fears the limitations of a large family, or ditto of a man who would rather send one child to an expensive school than send four to state college.

I'm not blind to the economic pressure on certain families who sensibly limit their families to the size of their income. But in 9 cases out of 10, this is a spurious argument—for the low income levels have four times as many children as the high ones. Low-income women are no more fertile than high-income ones; in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fact, if anything, sterility is more common among the undernourished low-income women. The answer lies in the stark simplicity of one woman's comment; "If you have ten thousand a year, you can afford NOT to have four children."

Unless birth control can be, as said above, scientifically and statistically applied over large geographical areas, with as much attention to raising the birthrate among high IQ and good heredity levels as is given to lowering it among the diseased and feeble-minded, then it would be better just to forget the whole thing.

Of course, I except one thing; I believe contraception should be *encouraged* among unmarried people; that a girl should learn how to protect herself against the possibility of an illegitimate child, at the same time she learns other physical facts. And I agree with Peggy Lindemann that marriage, entailing the bringing of children into the world, should be made VERY difficult, and staying married even more so. But (and Kinsey is no doubt cheering in the background) I also believe that young men and women should be encouraged to experiment as widely as possible before finally choosing their marriage partner.

But birth control, specifically contraceptive methods, between married people,should be the business of the individual; with no laws prohibiting their use, no church spreading propaganda; no blue laws making their trade an undercover contraband; on the other hand, no "scientific" bunk and hogwash to give the people an excuse for shirking their duty to the race by catching at the excuse of this poor old overpopulated world when what they really mean is their poor old overworked pocketbook.

As long as I'm talking about Utopias, I'm inclined to believe that children belong, not to their parents but to themselves, and that no parent has the right to regulate the activities of a child past age twelve or thereabouts, and at no time has a parent a right to censor his child's ideas, personal habits, reading tastes, likes and dislikes in clothing, and religious beliefs, except insofar as to refuse any unreasonable financial demands. Neither do parents have the slightest claim on their children's affection or respect except insofar as they have earned it.

Would you buy a story dealing with that kind of world?—*Box 246, Rochester, Texas.*

You have sketched here a society which permits the maximum freedom of decision to the individual. Admitting that such a society is the ne plus ultra—the goal of most philosophies from Plato to Dewey—you immediately stub your toe upon a few dozen of the booby traps thickly dotting the terrain. The responsibility of important decisions requires responsibility of character. You have just lambasted the upper classes—the better educated and presumably more intelligent as well as better nourished women—for their inability to make sound decisions. Do you think it justified, therefore, to give them greater responsibility? And what would happen if you gave full freedom to kids under twelve? Lacking the judgment which unfortunately only experience brings, they would run up such a record of well-meaning and other kinds of errors, that things would be really rough. I'm not prejudiced against kids, but their outstanding characteristic is lack of foresight, because experience hasn't yet taught them the consequences of certain lines of behavior. Auto insurance companies have jacked the rates on drivers under 25 because they have the worst accident rate.

This is no argument for a paternalistic policy, but it does mean that I think a certain amount of checks and balances will continue to be necessary, if only to keep the haywire portion of the populace from jamming things up for everyone else. Actually there is more truth than poetry in what you say and you might have gone even further—you might have pointed out the hypocrisy of many "good" people, who pay lip service to the accepted mores, while in quiet and stealth they do exactly as they please about their own lives. Kinsey probably would cheer you on if you mentioned the straight-laced elders who would crucify a girl for promiscuity but would take advantage of that promiscuity if it happened to come their way undetected.

SPECULATIVE EYES

by Howard M. Wellington

Dear Editor:—After reading a few letters in your reader's column in the December issue of *STARTLING STORIES,* I felt called upon to make a few comments.

I enjoyed Snarly Sabretooth Seibel's letter immensely. I liked the way he denounced the people who picked on him. If he ever writes a story I would like to read its unexpurgated version.

I noticed several letters written by women in your magazine. I think that their letters are rather out of place in a science fiction magazine. Miss Peggy Lindemann's letter would be more at home in the Parent's magazine. Child psychology and theology are interesting

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

points of discussion, but are hardly scientific.

Last month I read your lead novel, THE LOVERS, and found it much to my taste. It has even led me to the poor habit of watching passing females with speculative eyes. I suppose that it took the author quite a lot of time to do the basic research behind the plot.—*431 W. Webster Avenue, Muskegon, Michigan.*

Our correspondents have made the point over and over that letters which merely discuss the stories of several months back do not interest them, that the very factor which makes this letter column popular is the uncensored range of subjects discussed. In that we are inclined to agree since we have not yet fallen into the error of taking ourselves seriously and regard this section of the magazine as entertainment, pure and mostly simple. Glad you liked THE LOVERS; just don't pinch any passing females to find out whether or not they are bugs.

CREAM OF THE JEST

by Verna Jeans

My Dear Mr. Mines: I can no longer contain myself; for three seething months I have been looking for the richly deserved criticisms concerning "The Lovers" and not a single one have you printed! This is most difficult to comprehend. At the college we were all in a ferment over the grand build-up you gave this miserably written tale, many others from Indianapolis and Fort Wayne feel the same, yet you blandly continue to ignore it.

Does this mean that you have failed to notice the truly ghastly flaws and abysmal lack of logic in Mr. Farmer's story? Or does it indicate that you are printing only the kind comments?

Supposedly Science Fiction has come of age. As I read your fulsome editorial and blurbs of praise concerning "The Lovers" I could hardly wait to read it. Truly Mr. Mines I have never been so greatly disappointed. As a biology teacher I could hardly stomach the fact that the heroine insisted on having the light burning continously. To live forever all the poor witless darling had to do was turn out the light! I can see no reason for a magazine to print such puerile twaddle.

And I couldn't restrain my unwilling laughter at the comic strip ending (although to be truthful no funny paper would dare be so inaccurate). WHAT were portholes and ventilators doing in a space ship? Come now Mr. Mines, have you been relishing a secret jest on your readers? Of course this will never be printed, but I'll sleep better! Are you at all familiar with the works of Doctor E. E. Smith? Twenty years ago there were no portholes, windows or ventilators in even the FIRST "Skylark!"—*North Webster Schools, North Webster, Indiana.*

You haven't been looking so carefully, methinks, because we have made it a point to print every adverse letter on THE LOVERS that came in. The fact that there were only about four out of hundreds praising it is something you really shouldn't blame us for. (So I ended a preposition with a sentence!) We leaned over backwards to hunt down and print the adverse letters because we thought the almost unanimous praise would make it look as if we had stacked the deck—a conclusion to which you have come anyway, and which we hereby indignantly repel. As to the "ghastly flaws and abysmal lack of logic," quote:

You say all Jeanette had to do to live forever was to turn out the light. True, true, but she also would have had no response or satisfaction from her lovemaking, which you will remember was unavoidably connected with the optic nerve. The obvious thing for her to do was to keep herself pleasantly primed with alcohol, which acted as conception control. This is very plain in the story. *She* didn't know her lover was taking out the alcohol and slipping her a substitute.

As to the portholes, ventilators, etc., in the space ship—hasn't it occurred to you that a monster like the *Gabriel* was designed to function as living quarters and base of operations for a large crew *when landed?* And that portholes, letting in fresh, natural air would be an absolute necessity for men who had lived for months on canned air? Not to mention giving the machinery a rest in making air when there was no need for it? Logic? Hah.

Anyways, I hope you are sleeping better, Verna.

THE SCHOLARLY TYPE

by Alfred Bester

Dear Mr. Mines: I've just finished reading Farmer's THE LOVERS and I'm deeply grateful to you for sending me the magazine. I'm also grateful to you for having published the story, and to Mr. Farmer for having written it.

It's one of the most remarkable science-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fiction stories I've ever read . . . dangerously adult, really unique, certainly a giant step away from Typhoid Mary and her Merry Men. Frankly, Mr. Mines, I can't understand how you had the courage to place "The Lovers" in STARTLING. You seemed to me the mild, scholarly type, not the slam-bang crusader who took a belt of straight ink and said: "To hell with Mrs. Grundy. We're running 'The Lovers,' and we're not even cutting one incident."

All my admiration, Mr. Mines. I repeat: All my admiration.—*215 East 68th Street, New York 21, N.Y.*

Typhoid Mary is Mr. Bestor's affectionate name for the undraped female on stf covers who is usually being rescued by the hero from a BEM. To famed author Bestor (THE DEMOLISHED MAN) we wrote, asking if he minded our running his letter in this column since it seemed somewhat personally slanted, and commenting with gratification upon the lack of professional jealousy among writers, upon the enthusiasm with which established authors discovered new writers and gave them a boost up, thus making competition for themselves. To which Mr. Bestor replied:

"You terrify me. I thought I was merely congratulating author and editor for a splendid job. Now I discover I'm being angelic. If our profession has come to the sad state where it's unusual for brothers-in-arms to give aid, comfort and appreciation to each other, then by all means publish my letter. And if it will help to warn my fellow-writers that in our difficult and heartbreaking craft, the man who refuses to appreciate others refuses to appreciate himself, then publish this letter too."

So little jealousy is there, in fact, that I have seen discussions of THE LOVERS in the letter columns of other stf magazines. Their editors have not hesitated to run fulsome praise for a competing magazine in their own books.

Oh, and incidentally, the sequel to THE LOVERS is just about finished; should see light in the June, 1953 issue of SS. Title is MOTH AND RUST, which you will recognize from the New Testament.

This "mild scholarly" business gives me a belt—personally I consider myself one of the most unconventional people alive, but I find difficulty in getting others to agree with me, perhaps because we do not agree upon the definition of unconventional to begin with. *C'est la vie.*

OF BAD WRITING

by Richard Geis

Dear Sam: I was disappointed in the lead novel of the December issue of SS. Unfortunately, this has been the case since you published THE LOVERS by Farmer. However, that wonderful story only showed by contrast that something basically is wrong with most of your long stories. If you'll indulge me a page or two, I'll elaborate upon this thought for a bit.

Generally, I think there are two major failings in your novels. The first is characterization, and the second the ever recurrence of the same tired plots and themes. The hero-invents-weapon-that-saves-the-world story has been ostracized and no longer is available to the hard pressed writers, thus the poor fellows are forced to rely even more upon the few other tried and true formulas-for-science-fiction-novels. It must be admitted that the stories do reflect some changes in the minds of our writers; the heroes and heroines do act a bit more realistically than before, and the literary level has climbed somewhat.

The characterization in the long stories has been spotty at best. Usually only one person . . . or should I say name? . . . in a story has been endowed with a personality that is credible enough to come to life. The others in the story are left as names or as mere stereotypes. This stereotyping is very handy and saves the writer a lot of work. It leaves something to be desired, however, after the fiftieth meeting. Quite often after a character has been established as "real" the author then has him engage in activities that are very much contrary to that characterization. Careless and sloppy writing? True. And the solution is that the writers must take more time to write their stories. They must actually write novels, not fill out a skeleton outline with various padding materials.

The tired old plots and themes I spoke of earlier I'm sure you know more familiarly than I. You read them every day. You read horrible tyro-ish imitations.

Understand, Sam, I'm not blaming you for the situation the long stories are in. You've done a wonderful job. The problem is how to make the writers spend more time on their stories, and yet not suffer the resulting decline in their production and corresponding income. More pay? A higher word rate? Is there any other answer? I'll leave that up to you and the policy board.

The short stories were particularly good this issue, with SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME as about the best story in the issue. On second thought, make WHOEVER YOU ARE first and SHOW ME . . . second.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A special mention goes to SAIL ON! SAIL ON!

The humorous stories of Mr. Kendell Foster Crossen no longer amuse me. His plot . . . and apparently he has but one . . . is wearing rather thin. He uses it again and again, stopping long enough to change only names, places, and racial counterparts of earth animals. Same situations, same dialogue even. Great Ghu. —*2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon.*

It would be unrealistic for us to deny that much bad writing exists in the pulps as a class and that the reason is probably connected with the rates the pulps can afford to pay and so on. You can't expect a writer to spend two or three months over a short story as he would if he were selling to the big slicks where the rates start at about $850 and go up. The difference in time is exactly the difference in polish, characterization and so on. On the other hand you will also admit that you get much less stereotype in the pulps, particularly in the semi-pulp class of science fiction. What you lose in finished craftsmanship you gain in ideas, imagination and originality. In the long run this is more important.

Also, if you compare today's stories with those of fifteen, ten, five years ago, you will see enormous improvements in writing as well. So, while there may be little to pat ourselves on the back about as yet, we are working as hard as we can to push the level up within the limitations of the framework imposed upon us. This is true of every science-fiction editor I know, and I think I've met them all by now. They are hard workers and they have high standards, even if they have to compromise now and then.

Criticism like yours, nevertheless, is constructive, because it points up the desirability of better writing and it lets the editor know that better writing is wanted. It also backs him up in the war against those who would rather go back than forward in science fiction, so is a positive help. Did I say thanks?

BED-RIDDEN SPACE OPERA

by Mrs. Helen M. Urban

Dear Sam: Now the truth is being told: I buy every S.F. magazine I can find, and there are a lot of them and I read them all as fast as it is possible for me to devour the pages. Some good some bad. I fly by the newsstand and give the racks a quick-once over. An unfamiliar cover is the tip off that a new issue is out and I grab it quick. Now I don't care if the covers are rainbow hued and bemmish, muscular or bustcular, so long as the contents are new to me and the stories move right along. (Re quick moving stories, the only one in all the S.F., and Fantasy Mags. I refused to finish was a slow dog, something about Elena's Tomb.) To me the primary function of the cover is to identify a new issue and let's not confuse the matter by caviling about symbolism, sex, bems or 2, 3, 4 or 40 color plates. For that matter a cover can be cubist as long as it is recognizably different at a glance. (Go ahead and sling the paint, boys, we frantic fans will buy the magazines even complete with the "cute" or women's mag. type cover). Don't let me get started on women's magazines though, as on that subject I can get positively vitriolic.

Unless an author is too obviously a word mechanic, I like most of what I read. I liked THE LOVERS very much but I guess I must be getting old. I just don't startle easily anymore. Farmer's THE LOVERS was a well written story, his sex device was clever and delicately handled. To me, the most telling point about his skill and craftsmanship was the fact that I really believed in their love. It's easy enought to state "they are in love" but an entirely different matter to weave a spell of loving enchantment thru a story so that every action is colored and given clarity and reality by the living fact of their being in love. To clarify my not being startled, I noticed in the letters about THE LOVERS that many of the fans were shocked, bowled over, startled, amazed . . . choose one; and I meant to imply that I wasn't horror stricken by the frank delineation of the sex act, per se.

Turgid innuendo, that sophomoric aphrodisiac device, I just shrug off and let pass. (For them as wants it, good enough.) Rocketing around the Galaxy from one swelling bosom to another is so infrequently found in S. F. Mag. pages compared to the large amount of reasonably adult fiction dealing with the human problems arising from the conquest of space that I don't blow up the poor editor and heap coals of fire on the author for an occasional lapse into bed-ridden space opera.

So as not to be too hard on the poor artists and cause them ego injury, I will say that I usually like the story illustrations. The pen and air brush boys achieve some very nice effects and there is an occasional cover that does have some artistic merit (believe it or not.) I love Bems, machinery and handsome men. Being (to use an L. Sprague de Campism) a functional female, naturally one undraped woman more or less means no more to me than a slight case of green-eyed jealousy, in as much as I have managed to eat myself pretty much out of shape. (ah, true confession stuff.)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Abject apologies for the length of this, I could gabble on for miles. Keep up the good work. We all love you so relax and don't get ulcers on the ulcers.—*6520 Satsuma Ave., No. Hollywood, Calif.*

To quote an ebullient colleague of ours whom you will find on page 9 of this magazine, we got a charge out of this letter. We confess to a weakness for this kind of flambuoyant prose—not in stories, only in letters, as an indication of the kind of vitality behind it.

Ulcers? Us? Not on your hamburger. At that it is a hard kind of choice; eating yourself out of shape or ulcers. We haven't achieved either yet and being in science fiction we wouldn't know anything about the future.

TOPSY TURVY

by Bobby Warner

Say, Sam: You know what? I have a gripe. On the level. A real bona fide one. It's just this: I didn't like the cover on the November issue of STARTLING STORIES. I don't know why exactly, but it just doesn't seem to fit, somehow, STARTLING'S—what should I say?—mood? That's it. It doesn't fit STARTLING'S mood. At least, I didn't think so. What do you think? Oh, never mind—I think I know. You'd say heck, I'm just a loose fan who's got a senseless gripe about something that isn't so because the November cover for STARTLING was absolutely perfect in every detail; and, furthermore. . . .

See what I mean? You're just prejudiced, Sam. That's about all I can say about you. Here you go giving us a cover that's absolutely non-STARTLING, and before we can protest, you up and say it's ABSOLUTELY perfect—and that we should think so too.

Say, there, who do you think you are? You can't just up and shove any old cover down our throats and expect to get out of it that easily!

No sireebob, you surely can't!

LISTEN! Now look, we buy STARTLING and read it faithfully. You have GOT to please us; and to please us, you have GOT to give us the kind of covers we want—not just anything that Popps up. (That is a very obvious pun. So—the blue pencil. Think I don't know what it is? I do. You just used it).

As I was saying—YOU HAVE GOT TO PLEASE US! We want startling covers. We want sensational covers. We want *Bergey* covers? WE DO! And why not? What's wrong with Bergey? Now wait—you can't say that. He's been with STARTLING too long for—well, sure he has, but—okay, I know that, but—

NOW LOOK. You shove a rotten cover down my throat and say like it or else; now you pun Bergey. I'm finished. I can't stand these insults anymore.—*Post Office Box 63, Bessmay, Texas.*

P.S. Your November, if anybody hasn't told you, was tops!

How's that again?

As to Bergey, you have no doubt by this time heard the tragic news of his untimely death.

THE DISCRIMINATING FAN

by Ray Thompson

Dear Sam: I, unlike certain others, whose initials are Gregg Calkins (he's not bigger than me!) and J. T. Oliver, write only once a month to SS and here begins my missive for now.

Your editorial, SSam, was drivel. Of course, machines don't think! That's why the true robot is an impossibility.

Wotinell is that at the top of page 128 titled SINCERELY? (Who knows?—Ed.)

So Sabretooth Seibel finally went and joined up! I know this modest boy will go far. (Far enough so I won't have to read his letters in SS!)

I think I shall try to correspond with this Dick Clarkson. Come out from under that BEM. Clarkson, I'll tell Bob on you.

What's all the furore about Major Venture? Did I miss something?

Another question, Sam? What is the point in Farmer's hack SAIL ON, SAIL ON? There probably is one, but I'll be (censored) if I can find it.

When I bought my Decopy of SS, I also picked up the Decopy of TWS. I was paging through the thing, having read a few of the letters, when I came upon Jerry Bixby's column. There I died. I wonder if TV authorities don't read Science Digest, or Scientific American, or didn't go to high school. Even a high school knowledge of astronomy would cut three-quarters in that show.

Looking through the short notices at ye ende of Ye Vibrating Etherre—ye gods, a fan (?) only 11 years old?! Hardly out of the cradle and yet reading science fiction. John Donahue, me bhoy, tell your parents to read THE LOVERS—damn good story! I don't recall anything about the pictures being immoral, as Mr. Donahue insinuates.—*410 South 4th Street, Norfolk, Nebraska.*

Read MOTE, the discriminating fanzine!

Free advertising yet.

The editorial may have been drivel to you, who has already made up a mind (?) that machines can't think. But a lot of other people weren't sure about it, or rather

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that future machines might not think and they wanted to know. The point made in the article is that the designer, Dr. Lubkin, believes no matter how far they are developed they wil never achieve the ability to think.

Major Venture was a spoof on Cap Future. Real funny, we thought, and lots agreed with us, though some didn't noisily.

The point in SAIL ON? Didn't you ever hear of the parallel worlds theory in which there are an infinite number of worlds wherein every conceivable situation, somewhere, is true? Thus in one world Columbus was wrong—the world was flat. He sailed out and—oomph—over the edge. Thassall. Goodby, Ray.

SABRETOOTHED SAILOR

by Edward G. Seibel

Dear Sulk: You do have a mouth then, according to your own assertion in the December SS. After looking at a photo I saw with your name under it I was wondering if you had any semblance to humanity at all. (Flattery will avail you nothing—Ed). As I recall, I still have it somewhere, stored away to show my kids what'll get them if they aren't good. There won't be better kids in the neighborhood after one glimpse of that.

Didn't anyone ever inform you there's a difference between general service and the air branch of the Navy? I'm in the air branch. I happen to like the Navy so let us not insult it just because they accepted me. (They're slipping—Ed.) I couldn't see the army, even if my uncle did make colonel or general or something (your uncle is Eisenhower?—Ed) and rates are harder to make in the Navy.

Let's get back to science fiction, my favorite subject. Your latest flop was only mediocre. SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME being your best story this issue. I really enjoyed it for a reason I'd rather not disclose. (I know, you're half cat—Ed.) The rest of them had my eyelids drooping or me snoozing gently. THE CHILDREN was pretty good too.

You think I've got the women mad at me, eh? Hardly likely, I get along fine with the women around me. They're all mad about me. They just can't resist my wonderful personality. As for the women I referred to in my letter, who cares about them? They're in a class by themselves. I'll send you some photos of my girl friends and me sometime.

I could charm a snake, Sam, that's why you like me so much. You're very enthusiastic about receiving the story I'm writing—I'll bet you're quivering in anticipation. Better get a drink—no a fifth—to calm your nerves while you're waiting. You'll be more than enthusiastic then.

Getting back to the subject of women—wonderful little creatures—I took a bunch of photos of majorettes that were here in Norman for the game between O.U. and Kansas State. They all posed when they saw my camera and the smile they gave me as they went past!

Your magazine is improving, I must admit. This issue's stories are of better quality than the last issue. What did you do, lose your glasses? I hope they stay lost.

By the way, did you ever latch onto Neville for a story? You ought to, then you'd have a top rate magazine. As it is it appears you're on a slow crawl out of the mud to reach the stars. Why not make a big jump? You will when I send you my story. The trouble is I haven't much free time to write since I'm going to school. I never knew there was so much junk on an engine before. Oh, well, I wanted this school.

I suppose I should make some deep, sage comments on science-fiction in comparison to your fantasy. The thing is you don't have any fantasy in this issue. That flustered me, I'll tell you. I was dumfounded, beat before I started. I'll bet you done that just to catch me with my gripes down. Keep it up and you'll be getting compliments and then who will you argue with?—*P.O. Box 445, Olivehurst, Calif.*

You stay in school, Snarly. Your only trouble is that you left there in the first place. Boy, have you got things to learn—and not only about engines either. Things like women and why they smile at a camera and things like editors and science fiction—have you got things to learn about science fiction!

FULSOME PRAISE

by Burton K. Beerman

Dear Sam: The December issue was, for the most part, a flop. The feature novel was one of the worst stories I have ever read. Too, I found every other story in the issue, except the Merril and the Crossen, absolutely poor. Enough for the praises. A subject that has always bothered me, is the matter of pen-names.

At this point, I know a couple of pen-names for each major writer.

viz: Kuttner-Padgett-O'Donnel
Heinlein-A. McDonald
Hubbard-Lafayette
et cetera.

What I want to know is, practically every big name writer and his big pen-name. I hope some means of my getting this information can be devised. Thank you.

TEV:

Snarly: What you're doing, is making a lot of enemies for Neville. What if I were to tell you I was Neville?

Rev. Moorhead: You are right in saying, that religion is not to blame for everything, and should not be held to blame. But, the church . . . and the human race are by no

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

means infallible and are prone to misinterpret each other's meanings. Let's stop here, before we start another religious feud in this magazine.—*Grove School, Madison, Conn.*

P.S. The stories by Locke and Miller in FSM were two of the best you've had.

Careful with those compliments—you don't want to scatter them around so recklessly.

INANITY

by Rhoda Kater

Dear Sam, I am enclosing this letter with one about the latest T W S. Is that a breach of office rules or something?

Line up of stories—this ish was lousy.

The Long View—not so good.

Whoever You Are—so-so.

Love That Air—better than the rest.

The Children—childish and immature.

Sail On! Sail On!—this should have been drowned.

The Book of the Dead—Are you printing only rejects from other mags?

Show Me the Way to Go Home—how bad can you get?

Despite the fact that there wasn't one good story in the ish, nor a single one I really enjoyed, don't be dismayed. Perhaps it is only the day, or something as silly. Anyhow, I liked most of the stuff in the T W S, so that proves something.

About the letters, none of them seem to make much sense to me. I remember the reasons for some of them, such as a review of the stories, or space to explain your own peculiar views, but the ones that make such a to-do over fandom, and associated things, is a little too much. From the eminence of my 21 years, and the conclusive fact that I have been a fan for some seven or eight years, I think that I can say that some of this stuff is childish. I have gone beyond the age where it matters more than anything else to me whether or not my letters are printed or not. I like to see my name in print, and like to know that someone is reading what I think, and may agree or disagree, but the rabid, hungry way some of these people think up dangerous or insane, (or just inane) theories just so that you will print their letters, or turn up with some of the weirdest writing styles, for the same reason, makes me ill. I don't think I was ever accused of writing bad English for the sake of an impact on an editor, or someone, but maybe I am too harsh.

Anyhow, to go out on a limb, remember when I used to demand MEN on the covers, for the frustrated female contingent of fandom? Now all the other femme fannes have picked up the cry. Hoo Haa.—*1252 Manor Ave., Bronx, N.Y.*

Yes, isn't it awful the way some people will write the weirdest or most scurrilous letters just to see their names in print?

[*Turn page*]

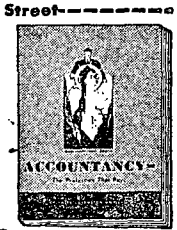
ACCOUNTANT
BECOME AN EXPERT
.. BOOKKEEPER .. C.P.A.

The demand for skilled accountants—*men and women who really know their business*—is increasing. National and state legislation is requiring of business much more in the way of Auditing, Cost Accounting, Business Law, Organization, Management, Finance. Men who prove their qualifications in this important field are promoted to responsible executive positions.

Knowledge of bookkeeping unnecessary. We train you from ground up, or according to your individual needs. Low cost; easy terms.

Send for *free* 48-page book describing the LaSalle accountancy training and the opportunities in this highly profitable field—plus "Ten Years' Promotion in One," a book which has helped many men.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY
A CORRESPONDENCE INSTITUTION
417 S. Dearborn Street
Dept. 3329 HR Chicago 5, Ill.



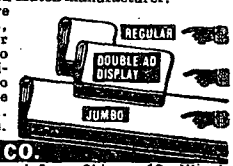
Please send me "Accountancy, the Profession that Pays"—plus "Ten Years' Promotion in One"—without obligation.

☐ Higher Accountancy
☐ C.P.A. Coaching
☐ Bookkeeping
☐ Law: LL.B. Degree
☐ Business Management
☐ Salesmanship
☐ Traffic Management
☐ Foremanship ☐ Stenotypy
☐ Industrial Management ☐ Machine Shorthand

Name..... Age.....
Address.....
City, Zone, State.....

MAKE EXTRA MONEY
EVERY BUSINESS EVERYWHERE
USES UNION LABEL BOOK MATCHES

No experience needed to earn big daily commissions. Be a direct factory representative of the world's largest exclusive UNION LABEL Book Match manufacturer. Prospects everywhere. Feature Glamour Girls, Hillbillies, scenics and dozens of other styles—Double Books—Jumbo Books—nearly 100 color combinations. New, bigger portfolio makes this fastest selling line a real profit maker for you. Write TODAY for full details.



SUPERIOR MATCH CO.
Dept. R-353, 7528 S. Greenwood Ave., Chicago 19, Illinois
West Coast Salesmen, write Box 1087, San Jose, Calif.

She Got $400.00 for a Half Dollar
I will pay CASH for OLD COINS, BILLS and STAMPS

POST YOURSELF! It pays! I paid $400.00 to Mrs. Dowty of Texas, for one Half Dollar; J.D. Martin of Virginia $200.00 for a single Copper Cent. Mr. Manning of New York, $2,500.00 for one Silver Dollar. Mrs. G.F. Adams, Ohio, received $740.00 for a few old coins. I will pay big prices for all kinds of old coins, medals, bills and stamps.

I WILL PAY $100.00 FOR A DIME!
1894 S. Mint; $50.00 for 1913 Liberty Head Nickel (not Buffalo) and hundreds of other amazing prices for coins. Send 4c for Large Illustrated Coin Folder and particulars. It may mean much profit to you. Write today to
B. MAX MEHL, 133 Mehl Bldg., Fort Worth, Tex.
(Largest Rare Coin Establishment in U.S.)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rhoda Kater, in case none of you fortunates recognize the name, is a reincarnation of Rickey Slavin, who was also a fan. This is what marriage does to femfans.

THE UNEQUAL STRUGGLE
by Ron Berner

Dear Ed: It has been many a weary year since I last one-fingered a missive to Frantic Fandom's Favorite Corner—TEV. Not that I haven't been keeping abreast of the times with you, for I have and, dear Ed, I sometimes succumb to more than a little dose of Meaningless Melancholy. How often I wonder if "Astra" still glows as brightly as she once did in you hallowed pages. Where is the Poet Laureat of the Bronx, Mighty Joe Schaumberger? Have they deported Old Battler Wigodsky, to Luna's nightside? (Can you imagine him in a place where darkness reigns supreme?) Sneary, Les and Es, Cox. Where? When? Why?

Yes, I do suffer from melancholy at times but there is really no point to it all as TEV has such a wonderful array of new feudin' fen. They are a great gang and to them I doff me Topper!

Dec. ish was, well it was the Dec. ish, that's all. In other words you retain your age-old ability of publishing a well balanced mag. Pratt, as always, spun a yarn deserving of the lead spot.

The climax of the month, in my humble opinion (THE BEST, NATCH) was Miriam Allen de Ford's "The Children." A woman who writes as she must be of a beauty and brilliance beyond words. Ah, if only I were the marrying kind!

The rest of the tales varied from fair to good but I will spare you any lengthy dissertation on their relatvie merits.

To Dear Ed.
I know full well, how you loath doggerel
In your fair mag it has no place
And when some fen writes it, you should try and fights it
With atomic bombat, Neanderthal's club or Martian's mace.

Keep up the struggle, fen—*99 Hoffman Street, Torrington, Conn.*

Amidst the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, it's nice to run across someone now and then who is cooking on one Berner at least.

On jingle, doggerel and verse
We cast a fishy eye.
The rhymers go from bad to worse,
It makes us wonder why!

THE BARE FACTS
by Georges H. Gallet

Dear Sam: I just re-read more attentively your editorial of June SS. I got back to it, because as a science writer, I was very much interested by your argumentation on the so-called "economics of hunger." But may I say, without being rude, that I fail to see how you can reckon that China could support 1,400,000 people if it requires—as you state—2 acres to produce adequate food for one person, when you also state that China contains 700,000,000 acres of cultivable land.

There must be something wrong somewhere. Unless I am mistaken. A rectification would seem in order, if just to keep records straight (especially for the poor underfed Chinese).

Of course, this slip of your typewriter, doesn't detract a bit from the rest of your highly pertinent paper and its sequel in July SS. I felt like mentioning it just as proof that readers are the same the world over and whatever their age group. They love to gripe. —*3 Square du Thimerais, Paris 17eme, France.*

You are right, we multiplied by two instead of dividing by two. So China could adequately support at best only 350,000,000 people on 700,000,000 acres instead of its present 463,000,000 on only 180,000,000 acres. That points up its overcrowding even more, and the economics of hunger. You're the only one who caught it—unless the others were too polite to mention it.

LINGUA-FRANCA
by L. W. McCabe

Dear Mr. Mines: I just realized that I have become a steady reader of your group of magazines during the last year or so and have acquired a high regard for your editorial judgement. I don't mean that I like everything you say or all the stories you print, but I believe that itself is one of the attractions of your magazines to me. I would therefore like to subscribe to your four magazines and enclose a check for $12.00 for STARTLING, THRILLING WONDER, FANTASTIC and SPACE STORIES, to begin with January 1953, although I haven't yet been able to find a copy of SPACE STORIES for December 1952.

I'm not a real dyed-in-the-wool fan so won't comment on the debates raging in the letter columns instructive though they may be at times. I don't even worry about a hard and fast definition of Science fiction, personally I like variety and read S.F. for amusement although I enjoy articles like Mr. Blish's series and those that appear in Asf and Galaxy. I liked JOURNEY TO BARKUT very much and HELLFLOWER and PASSPORT TO PAX and I used to enjoy Cap Future, but then as I said before, I like variety and any well-written story is acceptable. That's my feeling toward authors too, if they're good the exact subject of their story isn't really material because the story itself is the center of interest, not the gadgets and other details.

However, Mr. de Camp's letter in the De-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cember 52 SS brings up a subject I have gradually become interested in—the nomenclature of S.F., including place names and personal names. I was greatly intrigued by Mr. de Camp's own usage of the Hindu pantheon for the names of planets and also by the use of Brazilian Portuguese as the lingua-franca of space transport. Others have used the Norse pantheon, words from Greek and Latin (Pax) the names of letters in the Hebrew alphabet (Coph, Dalett) and placenames of obscure Terran regions (Kalgan—an oasis in Turkestan). Perhaps such a language as the Amerindian Guarani, still spoken in Paraguay, or the Arancanian of Chile might supply additional names and phrases, unfamiliar but unhackneyed to our provincial North American ears.

Mr. de Camp's own solution seems both entertaining and effective to me.

I have read a number of stories by Jerome Bixby with enjoyment and hope he will be able to produce many more.—*15510-9th Ave., N.E., Seattle 55, Wash.*

No more convincing proof of appreciation can be devised, we suspect, than a check for subscriptions. Much gratification. Your comments on place names is interesting—no doubt early space explorers will follow custom and slap familiar names on new planets and places—we may even have a planet named Mary G. Thurkenwallader some day. But we suspect that the job of a modern writer is merely to think up, or borrow, names which sound very exotic and foreign and so the far places of earth furnish a good starting point.

SUMMING UP
by Carol McKinney

Hi SM!—At the end of the biggest year yet for SS let me congratulate you for the many changes and improvements—mainly for going MONTHLY.

Yup! There were some pretty good stories and novels lately. Shall we sum them up, evaluate, rate the ishs? Ok!

First place (of course!) goes to the Sept. ish for Vance's warm, moving, exciting plot of BIG PLANET.

Second place to August, for that most controversial (and enjoyable) of stories, THE LOVERS.

3rd place awarded to June for the subtle mystery of DRAGON'S ISLAND.

4th to April for the down-to-earth humor of THE GLORY THAT WAS and the fascinating, THE LAST DAYS OF SHANDAKOR.

5th place goes to the strange novel of the Oct. ish, ASYLUM EARTH.

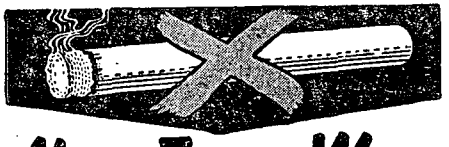
6th goes naturally to the May ish for the startling, (sometimes dragging) story of THE HELLFLOWER.

[Turn page]

MAKE CRIME YOUR BUSINESS
ON THE SIDE OF THE LAW!
Help fight crime! . . . Earn steady good pay as a Finger Print Expert or Investigator. I.A.S. trains you—by easy, low-cost home study lessons. Learn this exciting work in spare time. Write for full details now!
OVER 800 POLICE BUREAUS...
Employ I.A.S.-trained men . . . proof of what I.A.S. can do. Write today (state age) for details. No obligation. No salesmen will call.
INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE
Dept. 7963 1920 Sunnyside Avenue
Chicago 40, Illinois

STUDY AT HOME LAW FREE BOOK!
Prepare for the Bar!
Write today for a copy of our FREE book, "The Law-Trained Man," which gives the bar rules in your state and tells how ambitious men and women since 1890 have been preparing at home in spare time for the practice of law by studying the famous Blackstone bar-training course. All needed instruction material is furnished including big 16-volume law library. Law diploma awarded. Moderate tuition; easy monthly terms. Write for FREE book today!
BLACKSTONE SCHOOL OF LAW
225 N. Michigan Ave., Dept. 253, Chicago 1, Illinois

CARBURETOR TOO RICH
MAKES MOTORIST TOO POOR
Car owners who are wasting money, getting poor gas mileage due to over-rich mixtures, will be pleased to learn how to save gasoline by VACU-MATING OVER-RICH MIXTURES. Vacu-Matic fits all cars, trucks and tractors. *Automatic* and operates on the supercharge principle. Easily installed in a few minutes.
SALESMEN WANTED! Big Profits
For FREE particulars, how you can install one on your own car for introducing, just send your name and address on a postcard to VACU-MATIC, 7617-1970 W. State St., WAUWATOSA, WIS.


New Easy Way
STOPS
SMOKING HABIT
TOBACCO BREATH TOBACCO NERVES TOBACCO HEART
Banish forever the tobacco habit with its health killing effects on heart, throat and lungs. Don't be fooled by today's cigarette advertising with its tricky sayings and catchy jingles: Nicotine IS poisonous and a real danger to good health. Tobacco smoke DOES dry out the throat and make you cough! Sensational SMOK-NO-MOR Tablets must break the smoking habit within one short week or money refunded. Break your tobacco habit today . . . feel better . . . eat better . . . sleep better. Send no money, pay postman $3.00 plus postage for liberal supply, cash orders we pay postage. Write to:
CURTIS PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 15 C
53 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago 4, Ill.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DEVELOP A STRONG
HE-MAN VOICE

STRENGHTEN *your* voice this tested *scientific* way. Yes—you may now be able to improve the POWER of your speaking and singing voice—and in the privacy of your own room! Self-training lessons, mostly silent. No music required.

WRITE TODAY FOR FREE BOOK

Eugene Feuchtinger's great booklet "How to Develop a Successful Voice." It's absolutely FREE! You must state your age. Booklet mailed postpaid in plain wrapper. No salesman will call. Send your name, age now!

PREFECT VOICE INSTITUTE
210 S. Clinton St., Studio CX-6, Chicago 6, Ill.

Free for Asthma

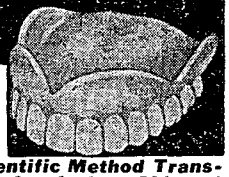
If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a FREE trial of the FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing.

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO. 448-T FRONTIER BLDG.
462 NIAGARA ST. BUFFALO 1, N. Y.

TOMBSTONES
DIRECT TO YOU $14.95 up
Genuine Beautiful Rockdale Monuments, Markers. Satisfaction or MONEY BACK. Freight paid. Write for our FREE Catalog and compare prices.
• EASY TERMS

ROCKDALE MONUMENT CO.
Dept. 438 JOLIET, ILLINOIS

New FALSE PLATE
for OLD
IN 24 HOURS
Low As Only
$15.95



Wonderful New Scientific Method Transforms OLD, LOOSE, Cracked or Chipped Plates into LUSTROUS BEAUTY-PINK DUPONT PLASTIC PLATES

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.

Why envy beautiful false teeth of others? We will transform your old, loose, cracked or chipped plate into a beautiful new, lightweight DuPont Beauty-Pink Plastic Plate, using your own teeth. All missing and broken teeth matched and replaced. Your cost amazingly low; actually save many dollars. No impression needed under our new scientific False Plate Method. 24-Hour Service.

SEND NO MONEY Enjoy life again, and save money on beautiful, new, natural-looking plastic plate. *Rush name, address for full details sent FREE. If your plate is loose, we show you how to make it comfortable, tight-fitting before duplication.*

West Dental Laboratory, 127 N. Dearborn St., Dept. S-45, Chicago 2, Ill.

MONEY for YOU Men or Women—Full or Part Time

Sell STARK Home Beautifying Plan

World famous Stark Bro's—Oldest, largest nursery in America—seeks men and women to make money calling on homeowners. Big demand now for home landscaping—flowering shrubs, roses, shade trees, vines, other "ornamentals". Also exclusive new fruit trees. Big profit on large, easy orders. Giant sales outfit FREE. Write today.

FREE! Sales Kit... Write Today

STARK BRO'S, Desk 6033, Louisiana, Missouri

7, the magical number goes with the magical (often whimsical) novel of the JOURNEY TO BARKUT, featured in the Jan. ish. A short story was also outstanding; THE WHEEL.

8th place is awarded to the Feb. ish for VULCAN'S DOLLS. THE SUBVERSIVES was a nicely compact short story for a few interesting minutes of reading. You remember it afterward.

9th goes to the March ish, not for the lead novel THE WELL OF THE WORLDS, which is hardly worth mentioning, but for another outstanding short story, THE HUNTERS. Realistic.

10th to the Dec. ish for WHOEVER YOU ARE and THE CHILDREN, both very outstanding and thought-provoking novelets. However, SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME was the bilious short that really brought this ish's rating way down. SAIL ON! SAIL ON! had a very confused way of telling its story—which was ok (in a way).

11th place to the July ish for PASSPORT TO PAX. (I give up on that boy).

12th place goes (automatically) to the—the (let's see—which one is left?) oh yes! November! What a collection of crummy stories! If there were 30 ishs instead of 12 it would still be 31st place. THE CROOK IN TIME—gaaaaaa. The lead novel THE STAR DICE had a very gaping and rambling plot. (Me gaping as the hero rambles merrily through each plot sequence.) Oh, well—Mr. Samuel Mines liked it anyway and Roger Dee has been known to write better stories in his time.

And that's that. Please don't everyone start screaming for my head at once; about 50 at a time is plenty.

When all's said and done, Sam, you really did yourself up proud and exonerated yourself for all the crummy stories you "accidentally printed in SS" when you snared BIG PLANET for its hallowed pages. Can't rave enough about it!

Thank you and good night.—*385 North 81st Street, Provo, Utah.*

P.S. Anyone want to trade sf mags by mail? Sometimes it's the only way hungry sf fen in small towns (such as this one!) can get a varied selection of stf. Let me hear from somebody!

Post mortems are more fun, huh? These will be coming in from everybody now, I suppose.

From Japan, PFC. Edmund M. Cox sneers gently at the October issue, offers the news that SS appears regularly in the PX's. If you crave to write his serial number is RA 11209432, 13th Sig. Co., 1st Cav. Div. A. PMO. 201 c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, Cal. Verna M. Hampton of 4245 Alcott, Denver 11, Colo., picked up an old issue of SS with the cover gone and wants to know if anyone can tell her its

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

date. The lead story was THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD by John C. Burroughs and H. Burroughs. It was September 1941, Verna.

L.D.C. Chandler of Rock Hall, Maryland sends three bucks for a subscription, says he is going crazy with all this talk about THE LOVERS—will somebody please send him a copy? Joseph Stamp, 28 Churchill Crescent, Georgetown, Ont., Canada, doesn't like humor, wants a copy of SS with a story he thinks appeared in it called FIVE STEPS TO TOMORROW. We haven't got time to look it up, don't even remember whether it appeared in SS—can anyone help him? Joe's dad wants some fans to write to Pvt. Joseph M. Fillinger, Jr., U.S. 51192630 Service Battery 84, FA Batt., 9th Infantry Div., Ft. Dix, N. J. Joe is from Buffalo (hint to local fans.)

Fredrick B. Christoff, 39 Cameron St., Kitchener, Ont. Canada, applauds our "today's fiction, tomorrow's fact" line and encloses a clipping on birth control pills as fulfilling the suggestion in our story THROWBACK. He also wants us to do something drastic to Seibel and disagrees with Marian Cox—who wants men on the covers anyway? A/3c James Gove III, AF-19422012, 814th Motor Vehicle Sq., GWAFB, Fairchild, Wash., wants a former buddy, A/3c "Woody" Aires to get in touch with him if he sees this. Jean Leighton Moore of Shinglehouse, Pa., is having a wonderful time with the new correspondence she has discovered through TEV. Nicholas J. Brownlee of Warm Springs, Montana, describes the action of a rocket in space for Wally Parsons (he missed an issue and doesn't know we've been all through it.)

Daniel S. Kahn, 8831 Fort Hamilton Parkway, B'klyn, N. Y., spots a Crossen error in LOVE THAT AIR—the Algolians couldn't hear sounds below the supersonic level—he says it should be ultrasonic, meaning higher frequency rather than higher speed. Marcel A. Roy, 446 Regina Ave., Verdun 19, Quebec, Canada, wants to swap magazines with fans. Paul Mittelbuscher of Sweet Springs, Missouri, blows the horn for Edgar Rice Burroughs, who, he claims was a better stf writer than Ray Bradbury—and if there are any more, I apologize. Until next month. . . .

The Editor.

BOOST YOUR EARNING POWER WITH DIESEL

Train Now For This Big Pay Trade!

Are you mechanically inclined? **Then you'll like DIESEL!** You'll like working on these modern engines . . . pulling down the big pay of DIESEL-TRAINED men. Train at home for Diesel opportunities with simple, practical UEI Training. Learn DIESEL engine operation, fuel systems, repairs, maintenance PLUS Scientific Motor Tune-up. Course includes shop training in our big, well-equipped shops, working on Diesel engines. Write now for FREE booklet!

UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE (Founded 1927)
2521 Sheffield Avenue, Dept. DR-8, Chicago 14, Illinois

How to MAKE MONEY with Simple CARTOONS

A book everyone who likes to draw should have. It is free; no obligation. Simply address

FREE BOOK

CARTOONISTS' EXCHANGE
Dept. 73 Pleasant Hill, Ohio

High School Course at Home — Many Finish in 2 Years

Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work — prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H. S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H. S. subjects already completed. Single subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.

AMERICAN SCHOOL, Dept. H-358, Drexel at 58th, Chicago 37

FREE—Amazing Book on
RHEUMATISM, ARTHRITIS

If you suffer the aches, pains and discomforts of Rheumatism, as manifested in ARTHRITIS, NEURITIS, SCIATICA or LUMBAGO, send today for the FREE Book. It reveals important facts about why drugs and medicine give only temporary relief without removing causes. Explains fully a proven, specialized system of treatment that may save you years of distress. No obligation. Write for this FREE Book today!

BALL CLINIC, Dept. 504, Excelsior Springs, Mo.

STOP TOBACCO

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write Today for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved over 300,000 people.

In Business Since 1909

FREE BOOK

THE NEWELL COMPANY
153 Clayton Sta. St. Louis 5, Mo.

BE A DETECTIVE

WORK HOME or TRAVEL. Experience unnecessary. DETECTIVE Particulars FREE. Write GEO. T. H. WAGNER, 125 W. 86th St., N. Y.

LEARN AT HOME

- to be a Nurse's Aide
- Practical Nurse
- or Infant Nurse

Prepare in spare time for a fascinating, high-pay career. Thousands of men and women, 18-60, are graduates of this physician-endorsed course. High school not required. Easy payments; earn as you learn. Trial plan. 54th year.

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING
Dept. 423, 41 East Pearson Street, Chicago 11, Ill.
Please send me free booklet and 16 sample lesson pages.

Name _____
City _____ State _____ Age _____

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INVENTORS

Learn how to protect your invention. Specially prepared "Patent Guide" containing detailed information concerning patent protection and procedure with "Record of Invention" form will be forwarded to you upon request—without obligation.

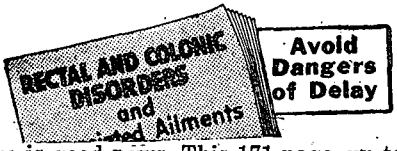
CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON
Registered Patent Attorneys
38-A District National Bldg. Washington 5, D. C.

OWN a Business

If employed, start part time. Alert dealers can gross $5 hourly profit on own service plus $3 on EACH serviceman. Clean, revive, mothproof rugs and upholstery on location. No shop needed. Services nationally advertised. Repeat customers. Easy to learn. Quickly established. Easy terms. Send today for FREE booklet. No obligation.

Duraclean Co., 3-693 Duraclean Bldg., Deerfield, Ill.

FREE BOOK—on Rectal Troubles



Here is good news. This 171-page, up-to-the-minute book on Piles, Fistula and other related rectal and colon ailments—will be sent free for the asking. It may save you much suffering, time and money. Write today — McCleary Clinic and Hospital, 397 Elms Blvd., Excelsior Springs, Mo.

Learn Profitable Profession in 90 days at Home

MEN AND WOMEN, 18 TO 60. Swedish Massage graduates make big money working full or spare time with doctors or in hospitals, health resorts, sanatoriums, clubs, private practice. A dignified interesting career! Qualify for your graduation certificate. Thorough instruction at home as in class rooms. Write for Illustrated Book—FREE!

The College of Swedish Massage
Dept. 363-C, 41 E. Pearson, Chicago 11

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF Startling Stories, published monthly at Kokomo, Indiana, for October 1, 1952. 1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Better Publications, Inc., 10 E. 40th Street, New York, N. Y. Editor, Samuel Mines, 10 E. 40th Street, New York, N. Y. Managing editor, None. Business manager, Harry Slater, 10 E. 40th Street, New York, N. Y. 2. The owner is: Better Publications, Inc., 10 E. 40th Street, New York, N. Y., N. L. Pines, 10 E. 40th Street, New York, N. Y. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Harry Slater, business manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1952. Eugene Wechsler, Notary Public. (My commission expires March 30, 1954)

REVIEW OF THE CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

OOPSLA, 761 Oakley Street, Salt Lake City 16, Utah. Editor: Gregg Calkins. Published every sixth Tuesday; $1.00 per year.

Still up-and-coming . . . this issue notable for chatter on the '52 Chicon. Beale's column good . . . and how much more revising downward can the Chicon attendance take?

SCIENCE FANTASY BULLETIN, 12701 Shaker Boulevard, Apt. 616, Cleveland 20, Ohio. Editor: Harlan Ellison. Published monthly; 15c per copy.

A great big one . . . 82 jam-packed pages. Can the boy keep it up? Again a section on the Chicon—about the best rounded report we've seen. The "David English Art Folio" enjoyable in an Abner Dean sort of way . . . likewise the cover. Remarkably free and easy for stencil-work. That "Excalibur" *advertisement* is enough in itself to drive one into gibbering lunacy, no?

RENAISSANCE, 155-07 71st Avenue, Flushing 67, New York. Editor: Joseph Semenovich. Published irregularly; 15c per copy.

Semenovich's zine still developing . . . articles and features.

THE JOURNAL OF THE MEDWAY SCIENCE & FANTASY CLUB, 21 Granville Road, Gillingham, Kent, England. Editors: B. Lewis; J. M. and A. C. (Tony) Thorne. 9d. per copy.

Lively little job . . . the Medway Science & Fantasy Centre, which offers for sale rocket lamps, ashtrays, plaques, etc., is worth investigation. Local chatter; and a review of James Cozzens' CASTAWAYS, which we second *fortissimo*. Terrific job.

INFINITY, 85 Fairview Avenue, Great Neck, L. I., New York. Editor: Charles Harris. Associate Editor: Bob Lawrence. Published every third month; 10c per copy.

Quite a few months ago several young fans dropped into my office. We talked about fandom, fanzines, fan this-and-that. I made encouraging noises.

INFINITY is the result of that visit, and I happily accept godfatherhood of it.

Neatly hectographed, despite modest protestations to the contrary. Artwork whimsical, varicolored (five) and of pleasant clarity. Next issue will be mimeographed. Contents fair-to-good, with pro-author Ajay Budrys and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fan-author Dave Brehm copping honors.
A better than average firstish, infints.

SCIENCE FICTION NEWS LETTER, Post Office Box 702, Bloomington, Illinois. Editor: Bob Tucker. Published quarterly; 20c per copy.

News, book reviews, a Chicon report. Good as usual.

STRAIGHT UP, 37 Willows Avenue, Tremorfa, Cardiff, Glam., Wales. Editor: Fred J. Robinson.

The last issue of this one . . . soon it will be replaced by an item named CAMBER. Hope C retains the sprightliness and readability of SU . . . probaby will: same people behind it.

SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER, 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1. Editor: Roy A. Squires. Published bi-monthly; 20c per copy.

Tops in swapzines. Usually contains a top-drawer article or two to boot. Subscribe.

SPACE DIVERSIONS, 13A St. Vincent Street, Liverpool 3, England. Editors: Tom Owens and John Roles.

This newcomer (second issue) in very much the same class as STRAIGHT UP, although better reproduced. Good lively stuff from the Other Side.

FAN-FARE, 119 Ward Road, North Tonawanda, New York. Editor: W. Paul Ganley. Published bi-monthly; 15c per copy.

Fandom's fictionzine . . . containing yarns fair to good. Also a report on SSR Publications (comprising Messrs. Ganley, Leverentz and Briney . . . and what does SSR stand for?), which is publishing fan-fiction in hard-cover mimeographed format. Ambitious project . . . and they need a buying public, natch.

Particularly enjoyed Leverentz's loud snarls anent fandom . . . and go along by and large with his comments but not with his choleric delivery of them. 'S wunnerful to be young . . . take a good look at yourself four years ago, Al. Not so awful in context, is it?

THE PLAGUE, 840 Asylum Avenue, Hartford 5, Connecticut. Editor: David A. Bates. Published bi-monthly; 10c per copy.

A tiny item . . . first issue. Contains news, chatter on zines fan and pro, a few advs.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF A SCHMUGIAN GUK, 620 West 182nd Street, New York 33, N. Y. Written by A. Charles Catania; published by Sheldon J. Deretchin.

The lengthy and somewhat overcute saga of "Harl," who one day leaps into his rocketship and blasts off to see the Universe. Follows twenty-two pages of cliff-hangers, during which Harl gets into (and out of) every

[*Turn page*]

Free Yourself FROM Tobacco Habit

If you have longed to stop smoking, try NO-TO-BAC Lozenges. See how the aromatic flavor of NO-TO-BAC Lozenges helps you give up the craving for tobacco. Rush $1 to NO-TO-BAC for 7 days supply. (For heavy smokers — 16 days' supply — $2.) Money refunded if not satisfied. Write:

NO-TO-BAC CO.
DEPT. S, HEWLETT, NEW YORK

LAW . . .

STUDY AT HOME Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before.
More Ability: More Prestige: More Money We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL.B. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 48-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send NOW.
LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, 417 South Dearborn Street
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 3329L, Chicago 5, Ill.

RUPTURED?
Get Relief This Proven Way

Why try to worry along with trusses that gouge your flesh—press heavily on hips and spine—enlarge opening—fail to hold rupture? You need the Cluthe. No leg-straps or cutting belts. Automatic adjustable pad holds at real opening—follows every body movement with instant increased support in case of strain. Cannot slip whether at work or play. Light. Waterproof. Can be worn in bath. Send for amazing FREE book, "Advice To Ruptured," and details of liberal truthful 60-day trial offer. Also endorsements from grateful users in your neighborhood. Write:
CLUTHE SONS, Dept. 33, Bloomfield, New Jersey

EAR ACHE?
DENT'S
EAR WAX DROPS for fast temporary relief of accumulated wax condition
TOOTHACHE?
ask your druggist for **DENT'S TOOTH GUM, TOOTH DROPS or POULTICE**

COMPLETE FALSE New PLATE IN 24 HOURS FROM YOUR OLD

NOW LOW AS... $15.95*

Brand new process transforms your old, broken, cracked or loose plates into new lightweight plastic plates.

NO IMPRESSION NEEDED

Let us help you enjoy life again. You will marvel at this revolutionary new method. Using your own old plates, we will remake them completely in only 24 hours. Missing teeth are carefully matched and replaced. Work is done on an absolute **MONEY BACK GUARANTEE.**

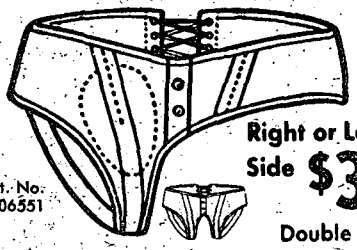
SEND NO MONEY —Just rush your name and address to us for full FREE DETAILS. If your teeth are loose, we'll tell you how to tighten them before duplication. Act now. Quit suffering!
Tru-Grip Dental Labs. 7th Fl., 127 N. Dearborn St. Dept. 15, Chicago 2, Ill.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Immediate Comfort
And Relief for You with *Patented*

RUPTURE-EASER

T.M. Reg. U. S. Pat. Off. (A Piper Brace Product)
For MEN, WOMEN and CHILDREN



Pat. No. 2606551

Right or Left Side $3.95

Double $4.95

A strong, form fitting washable support designed to give you relief and comfort. Adjustable back-lacing and adjustable leg straps. Snaps up in front. Soft flat groin pad—**NO STEEL OR LEATHER BANDS.** Unexcelled for comfort, **INVISIBLE UNDER LIGHT CLOTHING.** Washable. Also used as after operation support.

- **THE MOST EFFECTIVE HERNIA SUPPORT.** Thousands of people who have tried old-fashioned, expensive devices turn to Rupture-Easer for new comfort.
- **RUPTURE-EASER IS SANITARY.** Can be washed without harm to fabric — you never offend when you wear Rupture-Easer.
- **NO FITTING REQUIRED.** Just measure around the lowest part of the abdomen and specify right or left side or double.

Over 400,000 Grateful Users

Harley Decoteau, Montpelier, Vt. *writes: "The last brace you sent me was wonderful. I have been ruptured for 30 years. I am now 36, and in 30 years, I have never been more pleased."*

Minnie LaJeunesse, Minneapolis, Minn. *says: "... the Rupture-Easer is very comfortable and almost a miracle as to the way it holds one in place, and am very much pleased and satisfied with the belt."*

Frank H. Lewis, Adrian, Michigan *writes: "Thanks to your Rupture-Easer I am able to continue my work."*

BLESSED RELIEF DAY AND NIGHT — You can sleep in it— work in it—bathe in it!
10 DAY TRIAL OFFER
Money-back guarantee if you don't get relief.

Piper Brace Company, Dept. TF-33
811 Wyandotte, Kansas City 6, Mo.

PIPER BRACE CO., DEPT. TF-33
811 Wyandotte, Kansas City 6, Mo.
Please send my RUPTURE-EASER by return mail.

Right Side	☐ $3.95	Measure around lowest part of
Left Side	☐ $3.95	my abdomen
Double	☐ $4.95	is ..... INCHES.

(Note: Be sure to give Size and Side when ordering.)
We Prepay Postage except on C.O.D.'s.
Enclosed is: ☐ Money Order ☐ Check for $_____ ☐ Send C.O.D.

Name.....

Address.....

City and State.....

RUSH THIS COUPON NOW!

dangerous scrape, dire situation, gripping strait and menacing pitfall imaginable—monsters, suffocation, incineration, etc., etc. Satire on space-opera, of course, and amusing for a while . . . but deadly from then on. Judged on the basis of the near-pro-quality of a Catania manuscript recently submitted to SS, this item was written some time ago.

STF-TRADER, 1028 3rd Avenue South, Moorhead, Minnesota. Editor: K. Martin Carlson.

Swap-zine . . . advs. galore. Looking for a particular magazine or book? . . . or want to sell same? Now you know what to do.

QUANDRY, 101 Wagner Street, Savannah, Georgia. Editoress: Lee Hoffman. Published irregularly; seven issues for $1.00.

Leading the parade in mimeoed zines, Q maintains its standard (by now, a tradition) of variety, sparkle and readability. I received four issues in a bundle, and enjoyed 'em all. Give it a try.

THE FEMZINE, edited by Marian Cox, 79th A. B. Sq., Sioux City, Iowa. Published quarterly; 15c per copy.

Produced, as the title implies, entirely by gal-fans . . . Nicely rounded contents page, you should excuse the expression. Mostly fiction and poetry . . ., including a sonnet by Rusty Silverman, to whom we refer Gibson and other unfortunates who believe there are no beautiful female-type fans.

FORERUNNER, 24 Warren Road, Double Bay, Sydney, Australia. Edited and published by R. Douglas Nicholson. Published quarterly.

Something is going on Down Under . . . FORERUNNER is the first issue of what its editor hopes will develop into a full-fledged professional stf magazine. The tone of Nicholson's editorial reveals a mature and considered determination to work toward that end.

Stories are on a professional level, and range from good to only fair on that scale. Though FORERUNNER is mimeographed, printing is in the offing if the zine clicks.

Don't know what plans can be made to distribute an Australian prozine in the U. S. —by subscription at least, I suppose. Anyhow, good luck. And for God's sake, put the price somewhere in the magazine, preferably on the cover and contents page.

And that tears it, gang . . . for good. This is yours truly's adios to this column. I've enjoyed every minute of it, and want to take the last one to wish you health, wealth, happiness and bigger and better fanzines. See you around.

—JEROME BIXBY

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Learn RADIO-TELEVISION Servicing or Communications at Home in Your Spare Time

America's Fast Growing Industry Offers You

I Trained These Men

Employed as Transmitter Operator

"A former employer recommended NRI training. Am now operator at Station WKBO." A. Herr, New Cumberland, Pa.

$10 to $15 Week Spare Time

"4 months after enrolling, averaged $10 to $15 week spare time servicing radios." William Weyde, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Makes Money With Own Shop

"Am doing Radio servicing full time. I owe my success to N.R.I." Curtis Stath, Ft. Madison, Iowa.

Works on TV Color Control

"My position with WNBT is video control engineer on the RCA color project." W. Deem, Malverne, N.Y.

Praises N.R.I. as Best Course

"I realized a profit of $300 by the time I completed the course." J. Hopper, Nitro, West Virginia.

1. EXTRA MONEY IN SPARE TIME

Many students make $5, $10 a week and more EXTRA fixing neighbors' Radios in spare time while learning. The day you enroll I start sending you SPECIAL BOOKLETS that show you how. Tester you build, with parts I send, helps you make extra money servicing sets...get practical experience. All equipment I send is yours to keep.

2. GOOD PAY JOB

NRI Courses lead to these and many other jobs: Radio and TV service, P.A., Auto Radio, Lab, Factory, and Electronic Controls Technicians, Radio and TV Broadcasting, Police, Ship and Airways Operators and Technicians. Opportunities are increasing. The United States has over 105 million home and auto Radios—over 2,900 Broadcasting Stations—more expansion is on the way.

3. BRIGHT FUTURE

Think of the opportunities in Television. Over 15,000,000 TV sets are now in use; 108 TV stations are operating and 1800 new TV stations have been authorized—hundreds of these expected to be in operation in 1953. This means more jobs—good pay jobs with bright futures. More operators, installation and service technicians will be needed. Now is the time to get ready for a successful future in Television! Want to get ahead? Find out what Radio and Television offer you. Mail card today!

See Other Side

TELEVISION Is Today's Good Job Maker

TV now reaches from coast to coast. Qualify for a good job as a service technician or operator. My course includes TV . . . you learn by practicing on circuits common to Radio and TV. Mail card. NRI training is a tested way to better pay.

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT NO. 20-R
(Sec. 34.9, P.L.&R.)
WASHINGTON, D. C.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD
NO POSTAGE STAMP NECESSARY IF MAILED IN THE UNITED STATES

4c POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

NATIONAL RADIO INSTITUTE

16th and U Sts., N.W.

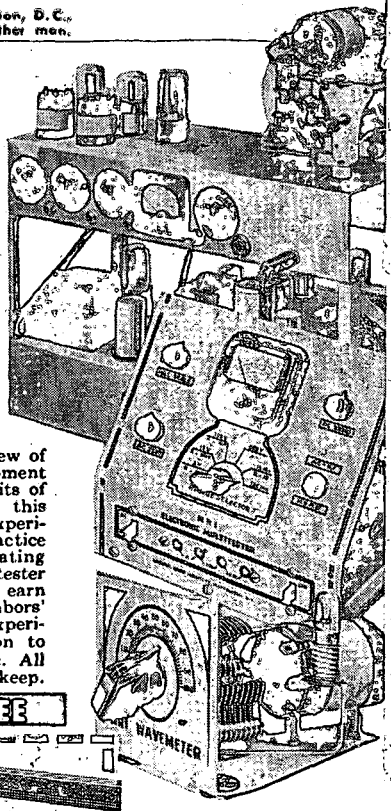
Washington 9, D.C.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I Will Train You at Home for GOOD PAY JOBS in RADIO-TELEVISION

J. E. Smith, President, National Radio Institute, Washington, D.C., has trained more men for Radio-Television than any other man.

Do you want a good pay job, a bright future, security? Or your own profitable business? Then get into the fast-growing RADIO-TELEVISION industry. Keep your job while training at home. Hundreds I've trained are successful RADIO-TELEVISION TECHNICIANS. Most had no previous experience, many no more than grammar school education. Learn Radio-Television principles from my easy-to-understand illustrated lessons. Get practical experience on actual equipment I furnish. Read below how many make $5, $10 a week and more extra fixing neighbors' radios in spare time while learning, get good jobs, build successful businesses of their own. It's where you find growth that you also find opportunity. Radio-TV industry is growing fast. Send for MY FREE DOUBLE OFFER. Postage-free card entitles you to an actual lesson that shows how practical it is to learn Radio-Television at home. You'll also receive my 64-Page Book, "How to Be a Success in Radio-Television." Read what my graduates are doing, earning, see photos of equipment you practice with at home. Cut out and mail card today . . . no stamp needed! J. E. Smith, President, National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C. Our 39th Year!



SEE OTHER SIDE

You Practice with Parts I Send

Earn While You Learn

Keep your job while training. I show you how to earn extra money while learning at home. I start sending you Special Booklets that start teaching you servicing jobs the day you enroll. Multitester you build with my equipment helps. Many students make $5, $10 and more a week extra fixing neighbors' radios evenings and Saturdays.

Shown at right are just a few of the many pieces of equipment NRI students build with kits of parts I furnish. You use this equipment to get practical experience, make many tests. Practice servicing radios or operating Transmitter. You build Multitester valuable in servicing sets, earn extra money fixing neighbors' radios in spare time . . . experiment with circuits common to both *Radio and Television*. All equipment I send is yours to keep.

Mail Card—Actual Lesson and Book FREE

CUT OUT AND MAIL THIS CARD

Sample Lesson & 64-Page Book FREE

This card entitles you to Actual Lesson from NRI Course; see how you learn Radio-Television at home. You'll also receive my 64-page book, "How to be a Success in Radio-Television." You'll read what my graduates are doing, earning; see photos of equipment you practice with at home. Cut out and mail this card now!

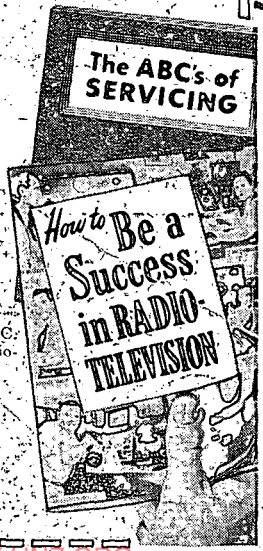
NO STAMP NEEDED! WE PAY POSTAGE. 3CQ

Mr. J. E. Smith, Pres., National Radio Inst., Washington 9, D.C.
Mail me Sample Lesson and Book, "How to be a Success in Radio-Television." (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

NAME ..... AGE .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... ZONE ..... STATE .....



Want Your Own Business?

Let me show you how you can be your own boss. Many NRI trained men start their own business with capital earned in spare time. Robert Dohmen, New Prague, Minn., whose store is shown below, says, "Am now tied in with two television outfits and do warranty work for dealers. Often fall back to NRI textbooks for information."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED